Everyone knows the thrill of finding a great deal. Yet, with every discount comes a dilemma: what are you willing to trade to get that bargain price?

In business, bouncing from supplier to supplier or vendor to vendor in search of savings won’t be worth it if the end result is higher overall costs. In the printing industry, we hear cautionary tales every day. Knockoff printing—also known as “clones” or “imitations”—supplies may seem like a steal at first, but they can ultimately lead to higher long-term costs, lower print productivity, and reputational damage to your business.

Nothing Like the Real Thing
Resellers and end users who do not fully grasp the potential consequences of using knockoff ink and toner often gravitate to cheap knockoff supplies.

As the price drops, so do reliability and quality. When HP asked an independent lab to test the performance of knockoff cartridges in HP printers, it found that 95 percent of the cartridges resulted in low print quality while the remaining 5 percent didn’t work out-of-the-box. HP also queried its best hands-on experts, surveying 150 American HP ServiceOne Partners who provide on-site or off-site service for HP LaserJet printers:

- 76 percent said HP LaserJet printers with non-HP cartridges installed require more service than those using Original HP supplies
- 94 percent reported Original HP cartridges helped reduce service costs associated with cartridge issues and service calls
- The average non-warranty repair visit cost $151, not including parts.

The upshot is clear: turning to knockoff supplies to save money is risky business.

Partners Help Customers Understand the Value of HP Original Supplies
Channel partners increasingly understand the benefits of original supplies, and contribute to the education their customers, not only to help them achieve optimal printer performance but also to help protect themselves from the expensive prospect of product returns, service calls and potential damage to their reputations.

Stargel Office Solutions in Houston, Texas enhanced the quality of their managed print services offering and reduced their service calls by 25 to 30 percent when they transitioned from knockoff toner to Original HP supplies. “We had customers requesting more accurate color and requiring service for toner leaking into the printer,” says Slade Stargel, president. “That kind of quality decline can impact customer perception about Stargel and the quality of the products, service and support we provide. With remanufactured toner, we faced the risk of losing customers frustrated with quality.”

Other end-user customers tell similar stories. When Italian homeware retailer Kasanova S.p.A., a company that
purchases 10,000 cartridges annually, looked for savings by switching from Original HP supplies to cheaper remanufactured cartridges. It was a lesson painfully learned. “The only reason to change to remanufactured cartridges was cost saving, but the decision caused a lot of problems,” said Luca Levati, Kasanova’s infrastructure manager. “The color quality was poor, which is not good when you are creating advertising materials that the customer will see. Another problem was that sometimes the printers did not recognize the non-original cartridges, and we had to reorder, doubling the cost.”

Protecting Our Customers from Fakes
For many of our informed end customers and partners, it has become crystal clear that initial allure of imitations or illegal counterfeits disguised as Original HP printer supplies isn’t worth the payoff. But what if these cartridges surreptitiously land in the hands of unsuspecting consumers, who’ve been duped into buying what they think are originals?

This is an issue that happens far more often than we would like. Ecommerce marketplaces have policies stating that third-party products from non-vendor partners must be identified as such by description, image use, and notations that they are “vendor-compatible” or “remanufactured.” But marketplace operators don’t always actively enforce policies around fair use for HP or other manufacturers. It falls to the vendor to find and bring listing violations to their attention to protect all legitimate parties in the supply chain. Another concern is that these parties will hijack reviews of legitimate HP products to pump up their own ratings.

HP proactively monitors for these IP infringing activities and works with online marketplaces to remove infringing cartridges. We do this for the sake of protecting our own IP and brand reputation—as all companies today must—as well as for the protection of our partners and customers. For decades, we’ve taken decisive action as part of a global campaign to protect our IP and stop the sale of unauthorized ink and toner cartridges sold for use in HP printers, most recently winning a patent litigation involving toner cartridges with seven different defendants in South Korea.4

Finally, we’re happy to report that the private sector is no longer alone in this effort. The Safe Shop Act of 2020 was introduced to the U.S. House Judiciary Committee. The bill would hold marketplaces responsible for counterfeit goods and prevent them from being able to profit off fake products that are sold by third party sellers.

This bill enjoys bipartisan support and is sponsored by several prominent government officials. While we have a long way to go in fully eradicating patent infringing knockoffs, it’s heartening to know that fighting fakes, protecting consumers and safeguarding businesses of all sizes is a battle we can all agree is worth the effort.

---


4 South Korea Seoul Central District Court case number 201+552979, filed August 2, 2018.