

CONSUMER ADVISORY

February 2011

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Online “Steals”: Internet Counterfeiting and Piracy

Who doesn't love a good bargain? When shopping online, the chances are strong that you will come across deals that seem too good to be true. The truth is that some deals ARE too good to be true, especially when the goods for sale are counterfeit or pirated. While many counterfeit products are of poor quality, some can also put your health or safety at risk. And all counterfeit products steal from the people who legitimately designed and produced the products.

Some websites boasting “incredible deals” sell the types of knock-off products you might find someone selling in a back alley. Other websites, however, make it difficult to determine whether discounted products are real or fake.

The following are a few tips to help you avoid purchasing counterfeit or pirated goods:

- **Too good to be true.** Use your common sense. If you think something is questionable about a website, it could well be an illegitimate company. Be on the lookout for poor quality photos, misspelled words and poor product descriptions. Also, avoid websites that offer unlimited downloads of movies or music. All of these things are signs of an illegitimate website; a website you will want to avoid.
- **Make sure the site is secure.** When entering personal or financial information, shop from online sites that display “[https://](#)” (the “s” means it’s secure) rather than “[http://](#)” in the address bar prefix. Also look for a padlock image at the bottom of the browser, which indicates that the website is secure and has a safe encrypted connection. Sites that do not have secure connections are not storing customer data in a secure manner and, therefore, could put the security of your personal financial information at risk; worse yet, they can even facilitate identity theft.
- **Is the site authorized?** Manufacturers often list authorized sellers. These are sites that are considered authorized online retail stores, and guarantee the purchase of a genuine product. If you are uncertain that a site is selling genuine products, ask the retailer for evidence that its products are authentic.
- **Online prescriptions can pose problems!** Be extremely cautious about ordering prescription drugs online. Certain online sellers may put patients at risk with substandard, incorrect or dangerous medications. Thus, you should buy drugs only from licensed online pharmacies with licensed pharmacists available to answer your questions by phone. Legitimate pharmacies require prescriptions for prescription medications. All online pharmacies located in the United States must be licensed by the state board of pharmacy where the online vendor is located. Go to www.nabp.net for a list of state boards of pharmacy.

To file a complaint or get more information, contact the Iowa Attorney General’s Consumer Protection Division, Hoover Bldg., Des Moines, IA 50319. Call 515-281-5926, or outside Des Moines call toll-free at 1-888-777-4590. Our website is: www.IowaAttorneyGeneral.gov.

