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Avoid getting scammed by cheap, counterfeit luxury goods online

Connecticut Better Business Bureau advises consumers on how to protect against high-end web-based rip-offs

/24-7PressRelease/ - WALLINGFORD, CT, July 24, 2008 - Shoppers seeking high-end luxury goods bearing well-known brand names are getting burned online by individuals and companies that sell inexpensive, poorly-made knock-offs. According to the Department of Homeland Security, these counterfeit products cost the U.S. economy as much as \$250 billion a year.

With police cracking down across the nation against street vendors selling counterfeit jewelry, handbags, watches, perfume, sunglasses and more, a growing number of bargain hunters are turning to the Internet and are finding out that they are buying bogus merchandise, rather than genuine items.

According to Connecticut BBB President Paulette Hotton, consumers can be easily fooled by scam sites bearing some of the best-known luxury labels.

"Just because an Internet site claims to sell goods from manufacturers such as Prada, Rolex, Tiffany, Gucci, Burberry, Calvin Klein and others does not mean people are getting the real thing. Not even online auction sites are immune from the problem of counterfeit product sales."

The fake products are being offered online through classified ads on Craigslist and eBay, two hotspots for sale of inexpensive copies of well-known brands. Both sites post "Buyer Beware" warnings. Last year eBay removed 2.2 million listings of counterfeit items and suspended accounts of 50,000 members for selling the phony goods.

According to independent technology and market research company, Forrester Research Inc., only one third of luxury brands actually sell their wares online; however, consumers can easily be fooled by scam sites using the manufacturers' names.

Adds Hotton, "Consumers are looking for bargains, especially now, but thousands of people have filed complaints with BBBs across the country after spending hundreds of dollars or more on web sites that they believed were selling luxury brands at deep discounts."

Connecticut BBB has some advice for shopping safely for a legitimate, luxury item:

- * The best way to avoid online shopping rip-offs is to deal only with reputable companies. When in doubt, you may contact the manufacturer to verify which vendors are authorized sellers and pull up a Reliability Report on the business at www.bbb.org.
- * A major red flag is an unrealistic price. Paying \$500 dollars for a \$1000 handbag could result in the consumer receiving a poorly manufactured and worthless fake.
- * Watch the wording! If the site overuses words like "genuine," "real," or "authentic," it is a bad sign. Another warning sign is use of the term "Inspired by..."
- * Brand names sell themselves, so look for misspelled words and brand names, poorly sewn logos and in some cases "authenticity cards" with holograms.
- * Luxury brand web sites offer tips on ways to spot a fake, with specifics about hints in the manufacture of their goods, such as stitching, which may be compared to a counterfeit item.
- * Craftsmanship is king for most luxury brands. If the sunglasses fall apart after a week or two, stitching unravels or seams

are ragged, the items are probably fake.

If you have purchased counterfeit luxury goods, contact your BBB and file a complaint at www.bbb.org. Consumers also may contact the Consumer Product Safety Commission at www.cspc.gov to file a complaint online.

About Better Business Bureau Connecticut

Founded in 1912, BBB is an unbiased non-profit organization that sets and upholds high standards for fair and honest business behavior. BBB offers objective advice and a wide range of education on topics affecting marketplace trust. BBB also offers complaint and dispute resolution support for consumers and businesses. Today, 128 BBBs serve communities across the U.S. and Canada, evaluating and monitoring more than three million local and national businesses and charities. For more advice on finding companies and businesses, start your search with trust at www.bbb.org