



Computer Security Tips



Are You Getting The Real Deal?

Learn How To Protect Yourself When Shopping For Software Online

(NAPSA)—Every year, millions of consumers unknowingly purchase software from pirates. At a time when shoppers are looking to save money, counterfeiters offer substandard products at prices that may be tempting. Counterfeit software can look just like the genuine product, but it can expose unsuspecting victims to spyware, malware and viruses and even lead to identity theft.



Think you can tell the difference? The genuine Microsoft Office version is on the right.



Cori Hartje

According to the Business Software Alliance, it is estimated that 41 percent of all software installed worldwide in 2008 was pirated.

The value of this unlicensed software has reached \$53 billion annually.

“Selling counterfeit software is big business. Although customers might think they are getting a good deal by buying software at a discount, it might be more costly in the long run,” said Cori Hartje, senior director, Microsoft Genuine Software Initiative. “It’s important that customers know what to look for and how to better protect themselves.”

Microsoft recently conducted an online survey that looked at perceptions and attitudes on computer security and counterfeit or nongenuine software. It found that four in 10 respondents say they can’t tell the difference between counterfeit and genuine software.

In the United States alone, nearly half (48 percent) of the 308 participants said they were not able to tell the difference between genuine and counterfeit software. Only 41 percent say they know how to check if a product is pirated or counterfeit. Compare that with 96 percent of respon-

dents who say it’s important that their computer is secure from viruses and other security threats.

“This shows there’s a major gap that leaves customers easy prey to counterfeiters,” Hartje said.

James Edwards, a customer in Florida, recounts his experience as a victim of counterfeiting: “I found out I had a counterfeit copy of Windows when I went through the validation process. The seller’s price was only a bit lower than the market average, so I just thought I was getting a better deal.”

Pirates and counterfeiters are becoming increasingly more sophisticated, and their nongenuine software is becoming harder to spot. Eighty-six percent of the Microsoft survey respondents cited quality as the No.1 factor when determining if a product is genuine.

So what should consumers do if they can’t touch, feel or get a good look at the products they find online?

“The best way customers can protect themselves is if they buy from someone they know and can speak with directly,” Hartje said. “Buying from a computer manufacturer or another reputable reseller is the safest way to buy software online.”

Linda Elmenhorst, a customer in Oklahoma, shared that “After

purchasing what I thought was a legitimate package of Microsoft Office software and loading it, I went to a Microsoft Web site to check for updates and other software. It would not validate that it was a genuine product. I needed this software to perform business functions and wanted the updates and downloads.”

Microsoft provides free and easy-to-use tools that customers can use to determine if their software is genuine. The How to Tell Web site, <http://www.microsoft.com/howtotell>, features pictures of recently seized software and guidance on what consumers should look out for when buying software online.

Questions that consumers should be asking before they purchase software include these:

- Are you buying from a reputable reseller?
- Would you be able to contact the reseller personally if there were issues?
- Have you checked the software manufacturer’s Web site for suggested sources for their software?
- Is all the normal documentation that you expect to see provided with the product?

Customers who have been duped into purchasing pirated or counterfeit software should return to the reseller and ask for their money back. They may also want to contact their credit card company to see if there is recourse and report the pirated Microsoft software to piracy@microsoft.com or at www.bsa.org for other products.

Buying software online can be risky, but with tools to help protect themselves, customers can find a great bargain and reduce the risk of becoming a victim of counterfeit.