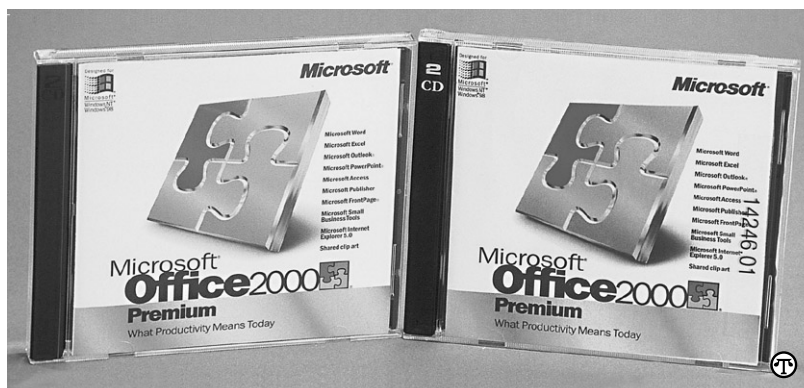# Your Auction "Deal" May Literally Be A "Steal"

Can you tell the difference? As software pirates become more stealthy, fewer consumers can differentiate between counterfeit and authentic software. (The genuine article is on the left.)

(NAPSA)—This holiday season, more than 25 million American consumers will surf the Internet and buy more than $6.2 billion worth of gifts, including computer software.* However, consumers shopping online must be careful to ensure that they get what they pay for.

The Business Software Alliance (BSA), a watchdog group in Washington, D.C., says consumers often aren't aware that software bought online, particularly on popular Internet auction sites, could be illegally copied or pirated.

The BSA offers 10 helpful tips on how to ensure you are purchasing legal software on Internet auction sites:

• **Trust your instincts.** Check the online seller's price against the estimated retail value of the software. Whether it is being sold as new or used, if a price for software seems too good to be true, it probably is.

• **Make sure it's authentic.** Be suspicious of software products that do not include proof of authenticity such as original disks, manuals, licensing, service policies, warranties, etc.

• **Read the label.** Beware of products that do not look genuine such as those with hand-written labels.

• **Beware of backups.** Take special care to avoid sellers offering to make backup copies. This is a clear indication that the software is illegal.

• **Steer clear of compilations.** Be wary of compilations of software titles from different publishers on a single disk.

• **Do your homework.** Check the feedback section on the auction site to find comments about the seller based on previous transactions.

• **Get the seller's address, if possible.** Remember that if you cannot re-contact the seller, you may have no recourse if the product turns out to be pirated.

• **Keep receipts.** Print out a copy of your order number and sales confirmation and keep them at least until your software arrives in satisfactory condition.

• **Be careful when crossing the border.** Be especially cautious when dealing with software sellers in other countries. The physical distance, differences in legal systems, and other factors could complicate matters if the transaction goes awry.

• **Report piracy.** Buyers suspecting software piracy, counterfeit software and/or fraud on auction sites should contact law enforcement agencies and BSA at 1-888-NOPIRACY or www.bsa.org.

* According to Gartner Group Survey, "Most U.S. Holiday Shoppers Bought at Only a Select Few Online Retailers," January 22, 2001.