

COLUMNS

Amazon: Right fit for luxury goods?

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Almost everyone shops on Amazon, the convenience giant. But how many people are willing to believe that quite a few items sold on Amazon are allegedly fakes?

While this article focuses on luxury, readers are warned that even everyday household items and low-priced merchandise are likely to be fake. Blame can be laid at the doorstep of third-party resellers using the Amazon platform.

Choice example

You have certainly heard of caveat emptor, putting the onus on consumers to garner the knowledge and legitimacy of a sale.

However, for luxury goods on Amazon, *emptor vultus alibi* buyer look elsewhere is more appropriate.

Not only does Amazon sell fake luxury items, its algorithm, "Amazon's Choice," recommends them.

For example, type in the search bar "luxury passport holder" and you will find what looks like a Louis Vuitton Damier passport holder sold by someone or a company named Rita Messi. Above the picture of item appears "Amazon's Choice," essentially encouraging consumers to purchase counterfeit Louis Vuitton.

Amazon repeatedly advocates for the elimination of counterfeit products and asks brands for help. However, luxury brands such as Saint Laurent, Louis Vuitton and Herms do not sell their products through Amazon.

As such, they do not participate in an Amazon program designed to work with brands sold on the site.

Watch out

It is easy for Amazon and other similar marketplaces to create marketing campaigns that reject or oppose the sale of counterfeit goods and that purportedly work with brands.

However, such measures are ineffectual when Amazon's own internal and proprietary software encourages the sale of the same counterfeit goods and does nothing to help consumers determine whether they are buying a counterfeit product.

For example, try searching for your favorite watch on Amazon. For this example, I have chosen the Chanel ceramic watch currently retailing between \$4,600 and \$4,900 on the site.

For a consumer unfamiliar with the ceramic watch, it would be difficult to determine which is authentic because the price points are similar, offering less than a 5 percent discount.

Amazon may, in an effort to educate consumers, give consumers the MSRP, advise if the model has been discontinued, and link to a list of authorized resellers of the product.

It is impossible for brands to police every street corner and every online marketplace because, as one counterfeit seller is shut down, two more are opening.

However, brands and marketers can learn from Birkenstock.

When Birkenstock learned about the prevalence of its counterfeited shoes on Amazon, it announced to its consumers and distributors that it will no longer sell its shoes on Amazon.

Therefore, any Birkenstock item that you may find on Amazon is not sanctioned by the company.

AMAZON IS convenient.

However, luxury brands must educate their consumers, particularly HENRYs and aspirational customers, who may be lured into the purchase of a counterfeit product. They, and the brand, will ultimately be equally unhappy.

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