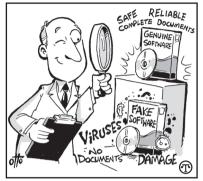## Too Good To Be True? How To Avoid Fake Computer Software
New Buying Guide Helps Spot And Report Scams

(NAPSA)—From designer purses to sophisticated software, it is getting harder to distinguish genuine products from cheap imitations when buying online or inspecting packaging in the store. Now more than ever, the risks of being duped are getting more dangerous.

Just ask Larry Howard, who thought he had scored a bargain when he bought a new version of Windows for his operating system on his home computer. The seller's Web site where he bought the product looked legit, as did the bargain software that arrived by mail at Howard's home in the U.S. But when he installed it, he found that—like fully a third of the computer programs used globally—the software he had purchased was counterfeit and it did not work.

Sophisticated duplication tools have made it easier than ever for counterfeiters to create authentic-looking disks and documentation that can be tricky to tell apart from the real thing. But technology companies are championing consumer rights and fighting back, helping people like Howard identify when they're being scammed. The latest weapon: an online software buyers guide developed by Microsoft Corp. that is also posted on eBay's Reviews & Guides section. The guide offers detailed descriptions, pictures and tips on how to identify genuine software, along with instructions on how to report potentially counterfeit software.

Cori Hartje, director of Microsoft's anti-piracy program, said that empowering consumers like Howard is a critical step toward reducing the risks and losses due to counterfeiting. "It is all about building consumer knowledge and trust in the prod-

Telling real from fake software can be a tough job even for experts.

ucts they are purchasing," Hartje said. "People need to feel that they are getting what they pay for when buying software. They deserve to get the features and experience that the genuine manufacturer intended, not a knockoff that puts their computer at risk."

The online software buyers guide wasn't available when Howard got duped. When he tried to register his software, he learned that it was fake. "I paid good money, about $110, for a counterfeit," he fumed. He soon found that the money he thought he had saved was not worth the losses resulting from the missing features and online updates that come with genuine software. Fortunately for Howard, he took advantage of resources that many software manufacturers provide. When he contacted Microsoft and shared his story and his non-genuine software, the company was able to replace his counterfeit software with a genuine version of Windows.

In addition to finding themselves shortchanged, people risk damaging their computers when they download counterfeit software. According to the analyst firm IDC, one in five Web sites peddling

bogus software attempted to install viruses or other unwanted programs.

In addition to the advice in the buyers guide, anti-piracy experts recommend the following to avoid getting lost in the counterfeit jungle:

•**Buy software already installed** on a PC or device whenever possible. When it is not, check the authenticity of any business before buying, by speaking to an employee by phone. Contact information should be supplied on the business's Web site.

•**Avoid "special deals"** or advertisements such as "END OF YEAR CLEARANCE" or "MUST LIQUIDATE INVENTORY."

•**Research the product.** Many software manufacturers have Web sites that provide examples of real and counterfeit packaging and disks. Microsoft recently updated its "How to Tell" site at http://www.howtotell.com. Additional resources for consumers include best practices and resources for purchasing software at online marketplaces.

•**Inspect the packaging and contents.** Most authentic software is shipped with complete documentation, such as manuals, and in professional packaging that includes a distinguishing label with a unique code or intricate design. Also, many disks that contain software are shipped on hologram CDs or DVDs. The 3-D image is part of the disk itself, not a sticker.

•**Seek help or report suspicious products.** Help is available from known, reputable companies that offer anti-piracy assistance, such as Microsoft (1-800-RU-LEGIT) and Adobe Systems Inc. (http://www.adobe.com/go/report piracy).