

How to avoid buying rubbish. Find out how to make sure the item you buy will serve you well.

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By Rob Mills

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It's happened to all of us at sometime in the past. You buy something new, get it home and plug it in, only to find that it doesn't work! Bad as this is, there's something else that's even worse and that's when something doesn't actually work quite as described. Frustration levels go through the roof and you feel cheated!

The truth of the matter is that the cost in real terms of consumer goods has been steadily declining over the years. Things are cheaper now than they've ever been. The pertinent question to ask is how can this be? Manufacturers will tell you that economies of scale are responsible and we should all be grateful. From where I sit that doesn't ring true.

Let me explain. I used to be a computer engineer. Ten years ago PC's were very expensive items and, when repairing a PC, you would quite often need to open it up and inspect the internals. The one thing that you could be certain of then was that the quality of the components was very high. Individual items were beautifully made and replacement parts would usually come with all the "extras".

Take a look inside a modern PC and the difference is immediately obvious. It's full of low quality high volume production parts quite often made in some country you've never heard of. And this is the nub of the matter. Sure production volume has something to do with it, but the biggest factor in reducing costs is not economies of scale, it's reduction in quality!

Over the last eighteen months approximately 65% of every new thing I've bought has either failed just out of warranty or doesn't work as expected. What's worse is where an item has failed, it's usually multiple failures rather than a single failure making it uneconomical to repair.

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Making sure that the item you buy new is going to last and give good service is now an exact science.

No longer can we apply the maxim "well, they're all the same" because put simply, they're not!

Avoiding buying something that is destined to fail is a tough task but I'll show you how to avoid the real rubbish.

The first thing is to find out about the product you are thinking of buying. Most manufacturers produce glossy brochures and sales material and this usually contains the specifications of the item in question. The internet is, of course, a wonderful place to find out about products. You are looking for material to make a comparison between different makes and model and a good proportion of on line shops have a compare feature. Make good use of it! Most manufacturers also have a web site and it's worth checking there for specs and comparison data. Warranties are an important feature of any new buy. A manufacturer that offers a longer warranty than it's competitors is saying something about the trust they have in their own products.

Having done your research you should now have an idea about which models and manufacturers you may want to think about. Ideally you should have narrowed down your choices to three or four potential

buys. The next step is to ask friends and relatives about the new item you want to buy. You want a new washing machine? Ask those people you know about their new machine. Have they had any problems? Does it perform well etc? Does it exhibit any peculiarities? First hand knowledge is a powerful friend and to ignore it is to set yourself on a course to failure before you've even begun.

Having discussed it with friends and family, the next step is to get back on the net and search for those products. Any that have a bad or poor reputation will certainly show up on the search engines but it depends on the search terms you use. Try searching using the make and model and adding the word failure or problems.

If any of your chosen products appear to have a particularly bad reputation, discount them from your list. With what's left on the list it now comes down to simply deciding which gives the best value for money. There's an important distinction to draw between "cost" and "value for money". If two similar items appear to have the same features but one is 15% more expensive than the other, it doesn't mean that you should necessarily opt for the cheaper one. Does the more expensive one have a longer warranty or is delivery included in that price? If you can see a good reason why one is more expensive than the other, you will have to consider whether the additional features are worth the cost.

If you follow the guidelines I've set out above, you have a good chance of buying something new that will perform well and give good service over a reasonable period of time - good hunting!

Rob Mills is webmaster at www.ihatecrap.net. A non profit site dedicated to improving the quality of the goods we buy as consumers

Beware Knock Offs - How Not To Get Ripped Off

By "Bridget P. Allen"

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Designer duds are expensive, plain and simple. If you are in the market for superb items straight off the runway but do not have the budget for buying items straight from the store, there are alternatives. However, you should be warned that buying designer items from anyone else that the original manufacturer leaves you open to possibly purchasing fake goods. Designer knock offs are sold on the street, in stores, and most popularly, on the World Wide Web. Protect yourself from spending hard earned money on items that have been poorly made from sub par materials. Just because the item in question possesses a brand name that is no guarantee you are dealing with the real McCoy!

Most of those items that are claimed to be designer goods sold on the street are just plain fakes. Use a bit of common sense when buying any type of goods from any type of seller. If you buy a fifteen dollar Louis Vuitton signature purse, there is a strong chance that item is indeed a fake. Remember the old adage, "if it is too good to be true, then it probably is." This cannot be truer than individuals looking super deals on authentic designer duds.

Regardless where you choose to purchase your cut rate designer goods, be sure the seller is reputable. If you are purchasing items from virtual stores on the World Wide Web, look to see if there are any complaints lodged against that specific company. Also, if you choose to purchase designer items from online auction sites like Ebay or Yahoo! Auctions, carefully evaluate the seller by searching the feedback responses. As always, go with your gut instinct—if you think something is a fake, and then avoid buying the item. No matter how great you are at sniffing out a deal, there is not way that bag you are buying for fifty dollars is a genuine Hermes Birkin bag.

The best way to avoid buying faked designer goods is by feeling the items. If the materials seem cheap, rough, unevenly dyed or woven, or poorly made, the item is probably a fake. Furthermore, take a close look at the craftsmanship. Check the seams, buttons, zippers, and any other items that can give an item away as a fake. With bags and shoes, look at the quality of the leather. Furthermore, the lining of a bag can tell you more about the quality of that particular purse than anything else, so be sure to take a peek inside.

Bridget Allen has worked for many years in the fashion industry, at a senior level, and she has written an amazing totally free fashionista minicourse that will thrill, entertain, and most importantly educate you about what you absolutely need to know about fashion. Get the free course " Fashionista Essentials" now at

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