



## Bogus Shopping Online

'Tis the season, and while shopping online is easy and sometimes quick, fraud is running rampant online.

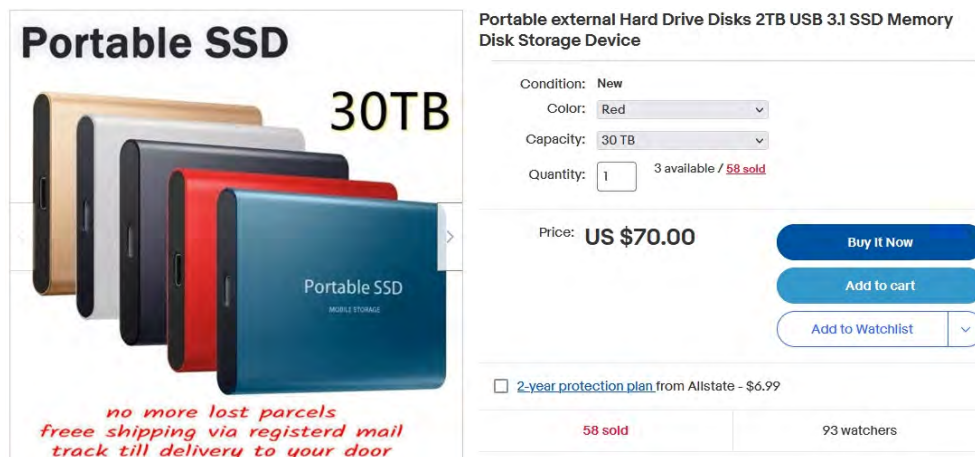
Fraud anywhere, not just online, has a usual pattern. The old way: A grifter arrives in town, selling watches, hair tonics, the cure-all of the day. Whatever they're selling looks OK at a quick glance, is priced to sell, and the seller knows they'll be out of town before the buyers recognize that the product is garbage. The new part: Do it on the internet.

What the internet adds to that, and especially 'Marketplace' sales where the online website tries to not be responsible for the sale, are several things, in sequence:

- Do the same as before, but on the internet. Selling one of a kind junk on eBay is the example of that. Skipping town is accomplished just by closing one account and opening a new one.
- Step 2: Do the same, but do it in bulk. Automate it.

- Step 3: Help others do the same, by setting the sale up as a service or a kit, or by providing the product to sell, basically anything that looks like it has substantial value but costs a dollar or two to make.

The physical product sales of scam goods is worse than I've seen in prior years. Here's why: When an online seller has a marketplace section (Amazon, Walmart, and others), or relies on sellers to ship products they describe themselves (eBay, Facebook Marketplace), there is an opportunity for fraudsters to claim they're selling better product than they have, to hide where they ship from, and to ship garbage that is just believable enough to delay a return past the refund period. And then disappear. And some web sites have reduced staff checking listings, and aren't catching the issues; the problems below are widespread this year, but not new.



The image shows a screenshot of an eBay listing for a 'Portable SSD'. On the left, there is a product image showing several SSDs in different colors (gold, black, red, blue). The text 'Portable SSD' and '30TB' is prominently displayed. Below the image, there is a red banner with the text: 'no more lost parcels free shipping via registered mail track till delivery to your door'. On the right, the listing details are visible: 'Portable external Hard Drive Disks 2TB USB 3.1 SSD Memory Disk Storage Device'. The condition is 'New', color is 'Red', capacity is '30 TB', and quantity is '1' (with '3 available / 58 sold' noted). The price is 'US \$70.00'. There are buttons for 'Buy It Now', 'Add to cart', and 'Add to Watchlist'. At the bottom, there is a checkbox for a '2-year protection plan from Allstate - \$6.99' and a summary showing '58 sold' and '93 watchers'.

First, some computer parts. These are all over eBay and Amazon right now. It's just too good to be true. 16 Terabyte solid state drives do exist, for the large-business enterprise and server markets. Western Digital has a 16 Tb data center drive for \$4,499. Samsung has announced that a 128 Tb SSD is on the way for enterprise systems. But you can buy an alleged 30 Tb drive for \$70 on eBay. Don't do it--it's a drive housing holding a microSD card, usually 60 Gigabytes (not Terabytes), with software that reports 30 Tb, allows writing large files to nowhere at very slow speeds, and in general will look legit or maybe sluggish, if it's just tested with a small file. But it's not made from SSD components, and is worthless, just fraudulent garbage.

And yet the reviews are mostly good. Some of them are fake, bought from a service that does that in bulk. You can spot these; the reviews are generic, mostly don't mention the product in any way, include spelling and usage errors, the dates are bunched up, and are mostly very short.

But not all good reviews are from a service. There's one of these fake drives on Amazon with 157 reviews, mostly very good. Unfortunately, the reviews look

like this:

- My 10 and 13 year olds LOVED these, however there were about 4 stickers they couldn't use in school folders because of guns...
- Just what I needed to extend a Cat6 cable.
- I'm glad my son love it 4 his b.day and enjoy it a lot.
- This is a fake product. Other reviews are for other products.

Others I've looked at show reviews for fake eyelashes. Why? That's because Amazon allows Marketplace vendors to edit their listings into a completely different product, but still keep the reviews. And they allow hiding the location of the shipper, and allow warranties that boil down to 'contact the seller' but don't provide any way to contact anyone.

Here's what not to buy, ever, from any marketplace sellers:

- Non-name brand electronics of every kind, or babble-names that are just random letters. Don't buy that anywhere. Yes, there are power supplies for a quarter of the price of a name-brand product. Yes, it's conveniently one third of the weight of the branded product with the five-year warranty and actual offices in the USA. And as a bonus, it can catch fire.
- Software. Buy it directly from the publisher. The marketplace shops are full of versions that won't run in the USA, are infected copies, or are stolen license keys.
- Anything from Kirkland, Trader Joe's, or Ikea. These companies don't sell online, so all listings are third-party, and amazing markups will apply, with no warranties.
- Plant seeds. That's unless you like weeds.



*Picture of what the seeds will NOT grow into, and a nightlight version. No such plant exists in the real world. It only exists in a video game.*

Yes, vendors are selling weed seeds. This is from Amazon, listed as “Dichondra Enchantress Carnivorous Plant Seeds, 30.” Does the photo look familiar? Have you played Mario Brothers? Yes, it’s a ceramic lawn ornament photo that started as a Pinterest image, modeled after the Mario Brothers Piranha Plant monster. Only here, it’s being used to advertise an insect-eating plant. Buyers report that if the seeds arrive from China, only a few weeds sprout. So it’s fake, and that’s aside from the illegal importation of unknown plant species that you could be held accountable for.

## What to Do about Fake Products

Fake products on Amazon should be returned. If you have problems doing that, check out the A2Z Guarantee for Buyers page:

<https://pay.amazon.com/help/201212340>

For products purchased on eBay, use the ‘Report this item’ link on the product page; it’s near the description section, just above the eBay item number.

The United States Government Accountability Office has a good writeup on online purchase issues, and where to report problems:

<https://www.gao.gov/blog/2018/03/09/are-your-online-purchases-legit>

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## Update on Windows Updates

For the Windows 10 users out there, go ahead and install the “2022 second half” or 22H2 update for Windows 10. It’s not causing issues, and will extend monthly security updates out to May 2024. Install by pressing Start, typing ‘updates’ and selecting it in the Windows Update settings. A long reboot will be required, so when running it for notebooks and laptops, plug into power during the update.

For Windows 11 users: Don’t install the 22H2 update yet. Microsoft has not yet fixed all the speed and stability issues of this annual feature update in the monthly quality/security updates. Let’s wait on this until at least after January’s Patch Tuesday, January 10th, 2023.

Again, to check Windows versions, click on Start (the Windows logo key), type WinVer, and run it from the search result. The version appears on the second line.



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