

SOFTWARE BUYING GUIDE

How to Avoid Buying Illegal Software on an Auction Site

Here are some warning signs to help you spot illegal software being sold through an auction:

- **Price:** If the price is too good to be true, it probably is. For example, \$20 for a \$200 retail-priced piece of software. As a general rule, if there is more than a 20% discount on the Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price (MSRP) without rebates, then there is a significant risk that the seller is selling illegal software.
- **Seller's Reputation:** Check the seller's reputation. Don't be fooled by the term "Power Seller" or a good rating. Check their user comments—do they have any neutral/negative feedback from buyers claiming fraud by the seller?
- **Other Auctions by the Seller:** Check the seller's other auctions. Has this seller placed 10, 20 or more auctions for the exact same piece of software, all at an unbelievable price? This is almost always an indicator of pirated software.
- **Seller's History:** Check the seller's history. Has this seller just recently appeared and started selling massive amounts of the same piece or set of software products?
- **Seller's Location:** Check the location of the seller. Are they offering product from another region of the world? In addition to the potential for piracy, you may be purchasing software that will be incompatible for your computer or may be unlicensed for distribution in the US. Many foreign sellers will attempt to mask their location to appear as though they are US sellers. Checking the seller's information (such as bidding currency, language used, etc) that may help you assess the true location of the seller.
- **Auction Length:** Most auctions last from five to seven days. Auctions for less than that – one and three day auctions – are often posted by those selling illegal software who are trying to make a quick sale before the copyright owner takes down their auction.
- **Communication with Seller:** Does the seller offer to sell the software outside of the auction or after the auction was removed by the copyright owner? If the seller is willing to cheat the auction operator, he'll probably cheat you as well.
- **Special Activation or Registration Process:** If the seller provides a special number or procedure for activating or registering your software before you can use it, you are likely getting a pirate copy of the software. The same is true if the seller states that the software can't be registered.
- **Text of Auction:** Warning signs that may appear in the text of the auction:
 - The software is being offered at a price well below the retail price.
 - The software is identified as "OEM" and is not bundled with authorized hardware.
 - The software is being sold as a "back-up copy".
 - Offers of "brand new CD in sleeve," not in a box.
 - Offers of "beta," pre-release or NFR ("not for resale") versions.

- Offers of compilations (multiple products from different publishers on the same CD). Legal software is rarely, if ever, sold that way.
 - Offers of academic versions that do not state the eligibility requirements.
 - The software is advertised as a "full version," but the auction states that you will only receive CDs.
 - The software is identified as an upgrade version. If you do not own a licensed copy of the underlying version of that software, you may not install the upgrade version.
 - Don't let official-looking logos and graphics fool you. Dishonest sellers are consistently trying to stay on step ahead of auction site, SIIA and the public by concocting new ways to deceive unknowing buyers.
- **Software Packaging or CD:** If you've already purchased and received software from a seller, here are some additional warning signs that the software you purchased is illegal:
 - The software lacks proper documentation
 - The CD, product packaging or manual is of inferior quality or includes handwritten labels.
 - The serial number/CD key is printed on the CD, sleeve.
 - The software is labeled "OEM" and not bundled with authorized hardware.
 - **Certified Sellers:** Don't buy software from a seller who does not display the SIIA Certified Software Reseller mark:



So, how can be sure you are buying legal software?

Go to <http://www.sii.net/piracy/resellers.asp> to find a list of authorized resellers,

What should you do if you come across a seller that you suspect of selling illegal software?

Report them to SIIA at http://www.sii.net/piracy/report/internet_form.asp.

The Software & Information Industry Association (SIIA) is the principal trade association for the software and digital content industry. SIIA's Anti-Piracy Division conducts a comprehensive, industry-wide campaign to fight software piracy. The pro-active campaign is premised on the notion that one must balance enforcement with education in order to be effective.