

Avoiding Scam Reviews on Amazon and Other Online Retailers

July 18, 2019 - Shopping from the comfort of your own home can be a great experience, but it can also leave you open to scams. That's why most of us today look at product reviews before we buy. For larger purchases, you may wind up looking at Consumer Reports or a specialized source for whatever product you're contemplating. But even then you'll probably want to look at reviews for the merchant you are thinking of purchasing from. If you've done much shopping online, you probably already know that a lot of online reviews are fake. To keep from getting scammed, you'll have to do a little more work.

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A while back, I decided to buy some generic toner cartridges for my color laser printer. And why not. The OEM cartridges were very expensive - around \$400 to replace them all. And since I had been refilling ink and purchasing generic jet cartridges for years without any issue, I didn't see why laser cartridges should be any different. Boy, was I wrong!

When I made the purchase, I looked at the reviews online. In my case, that meant Amazon. I found a merchant with lots of great reviews - around 4.5 stars - and made the purchase.

When my delivery showed up, I thought I had gotten exactly what I wanted and for a great price. Around \$75 for three color and one black cartridges. What a bargain!

Then I installed them. Within a day, they had leaked toner all over the inside of my very expensive printer. The bargain was now looking a lot less attractive. That's when I decided to dive back into the reviews and discovered that a lot of them were probably not written by real customers.

Legitimate eTailors like Amazon know that fake reviews are a problem, but that doesn't keep them from showing up on their websites. The trouble is, it can be hard to tell which reviews are legitimate if you don't know what to look for. Here are a few things you can do to avoid falling victim.

The first thing to look at is the newest reviews. Just because a product or merchant has 4 stars is a lot less meaningful if all of the reviews that came in over the past week are 1 star. You'd be surprised at how often you'll see that. Perhaps the product quality has changed, or the merchant has changed hands. More likely than not though, the good reviews were paid for or the merchant did them on his own. Time walk away.

You should also take a look at where the merchant is located. To find that out you may have to look at the shipping information. Specifically, where the merchandise will ship from. If it's a company supposedly located in Ohio and shipping from there, but all of the good reviews from people without good English language skills, be careful. At that point you should start digging through reviews until you find some that are well written. If those reviews aren't so good you may want to reconsider your purchase.

And finally, before you make a purchase, you may want to look at other reviews by the same reviewers. Amazon makes this fairly easy to do, but you have to know what you're looking for. When you are looking at a product's page on Amazon, they will show a bar-graph for the reviews the product has received. Above the graph, it may say something like "4.2 out of 5 stars" and then it will provide a breakdown of each of the star ratings the product has received. Click on the five-star bar, and you'll be taken to the five-star reviews. Then in each review, you can click on the name of the person who wrote the review. That will take you to their profile page.

Once you are on the reviewer's profile page, you'll be able to scroll down to see all of the reviews they have written. If every single review is five stars, I would personally discount that review and move on to the next reviewer. I don't know of anyone who has had nothing but good experiences when shopping online. On the other hand, if you see a few reviews of three stars or lower on the profile page, that makes me think that the review is legitimate.

While Amazon makes this task relatively easy, even if it is somewhat time consuming, other sites may not be as forthcoming. You may have to dig around to find the information you're looking for. And if you can't find it but decide to make the purchase anyway, you'll at least be an informed consumer and aware of the potential risks. The old adage still applies. Buyer beware!

by Jim Malmberg

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