Blatant tech frauds run amok on the biggest online marketplaces



Enlarge / What’re ya buyin’?
Aurich Lawson | Capcom

reader comments

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Online retailers that host third-party sellers, like Amazon and Walmart, have extensive, competitively priced electronics selections. But for years, they have also served as playgrounds for fraudulent sellers, who list products with inflated or deceptive performance claims. Worse, some of these products pose a physical threat to customers.

The problem has become so widespread that by the end of this month, the federal government will require online retailers to do a much better job of vetting seller credentials, courtesy

of the Integrity, Notification, and Fairness in Online Retail Marketplaces for Consumers (INFORM Consumers) Act. But scammers are persistent, and workarounds seem inevitable. So what more should we demand from these giant retailers, and what can shoppers, including the less tech-savvy, do to take matters into their own hands?

To paint a picture of how prominent scammy tech is online, imagine you're in the market for a roomy portable SSD. You eventually land at Walmart.com, where there's a 60TB drive selling for under $39. The only downside? It's obviously not a real 60TB SSD.

In reality, even a 2TB portable SSD will run you three figures. But for years, this scam has run amok on popular online marketplaces. Review Geek recently showed that the scheme includes selling a much lower-capacity *microSD card* instead of a large-capacity *SSD (*the site received a 64GB card instead of the advertised 16TB SSD).

Fake SSDs are just one example of counterfeit tech scams on huge online retailers, though. Consumers also have to look out for fake Apple chargers, cables that don't meet the advertised specs, and counterfeit batteries that threaten serious physical harm.

Despite their considerable resources, these marketplaces have failed to properly vet sellers and their products. Without outside pressure, shoppers will continue to pay the price.

Blatant scams

Counterfeit goods aren't just products that use the brand name of an established company, like a knockoff Gucci handbag. They also include items that look *like* products from a brand without using its name or logos. The gallery below shows examples of the latter. The $34 16TB "SSD" and 4TB $26 "SSD" don't say "Samsung" but nevertheless look similar to Samsung's

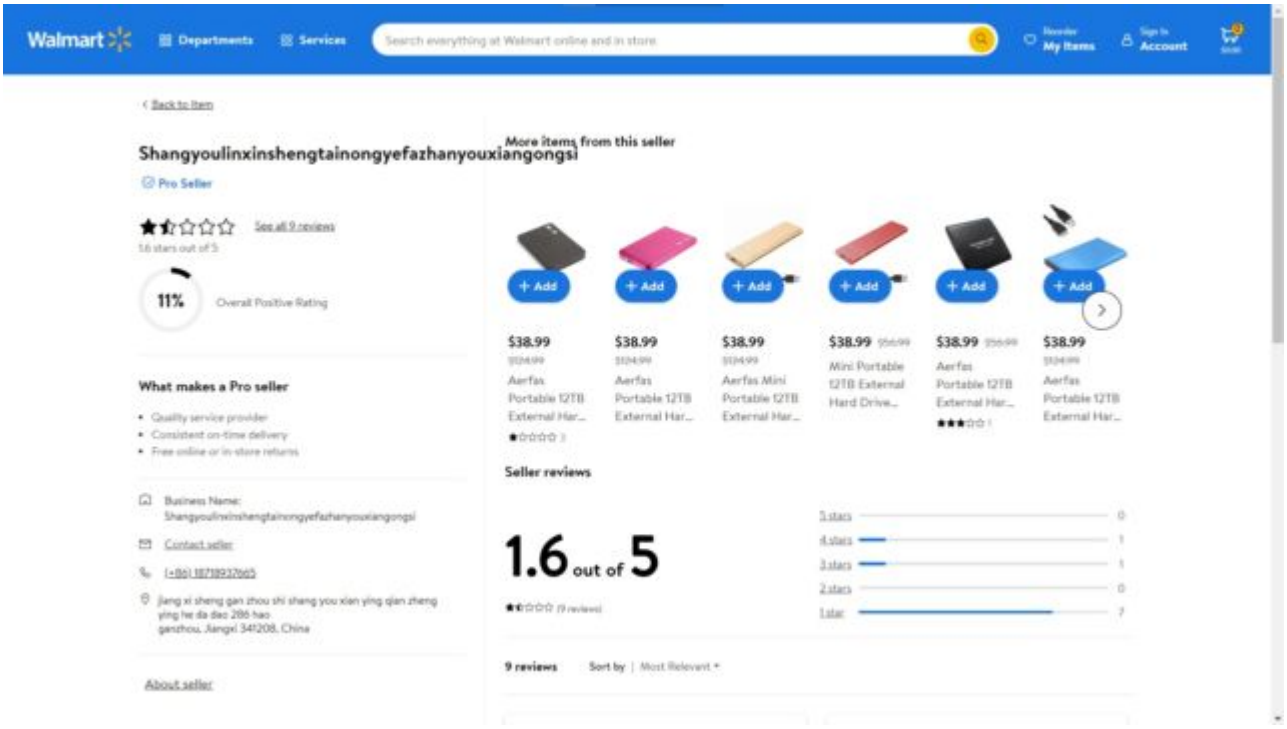
popular T7 portable SSDs.

Advertisement

- Samsung’s legit T7 SSD.
- You can buy a so-called 16TB portable SSD from “Jelita” off Walmart. Look familiar?
- Samsung’s T7 comes in red. So does “ODYSITE’s” $26 alleged SSD that claims 30TB in its title but is only configurable to 4TB.

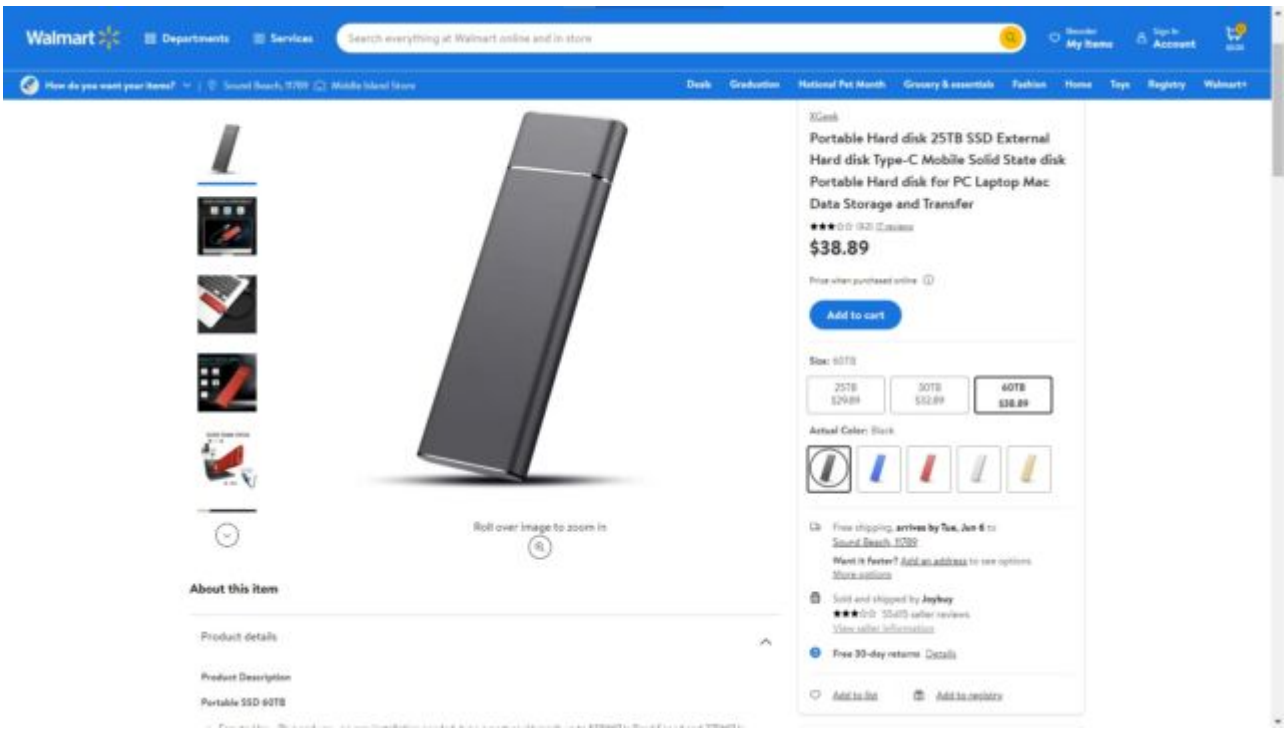
On Walmart.com, you can find fake listings for a 4TB portable SSD for $26, a 12TB model for $39, a 16TB drive for $34, or even a 25TB version for $39 (we’re linking these products for illustrative purposes—please don’t buy them). When I reached out to Walmart about similar listings, it removed them. But I didn’t ask the company about the listings above, and they remain active as of this writing.

I didn’t even have to dig deep to find these listings. Some of the sellers of the above “SSDs” have OK ratings, but it’s unclear how much that matters. As of press time, “Shangyoulinxinshengtainongyefazhanyouxiangongsi” is listed as a Walmart Pro seller, despite having a review average of just 1.5 stars.



Enlarge / This doesn’t look like the profile of a vendor Walmart should consider a “Pro seller.”

Walmart’s website, like Amazon’s, also puts a more prominent focus on the product’s purported brand than the seller, which is listed lower down the page and in smaller font.



Enlarge / It’s easier to spot “XGeek” than Joybuy.”

Here’s the kicker. Two of the fake SSD listings linked above have sellers with eerily similar names—Joybuy and JoyBuy Selection—and matching logos:



Enlarge / I smell multiple profiles—why doesn’t Walmart?
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