



How to spot a Fake

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by Edmund Proffitt, Chief Executive of the British Dental Industry Association (BDIA)

The Internet is rife with counterfeit and sub-standard dental equipment. And, while we all love a bargain – it's human nature – don't risk your patients' safety, or your registration, for a cheap deal.

Most of us buy online almost daily now – from the weekly grocery shop to major purchases like holidays and cars, and there are, indeed, great deals to be had. But the Internet has also opened the floodgates to a problem that is growing in all sectors, including dentistry: the sale of counterfeit, sub-standard and even stolen goods. These are often virtually impossible to differentiate from the genuine product and are at best illegal and at worst downright dangerous.

The commonest cheap copies tend to be disposable items, but higher value products – such as handpieces, curing lights and even x-ray equipment, mostly made in China – are widely counterfeited and sold through sites such as Ali Baba, Amazon and ebay. And are finding their way into dental practices around the UK.

The fakes are growing in sophistication. They appear to have CE marks, bar codes, serial numbers and holographic labels – all counterfeit. Even the accompanying documentation is expertly forged to be indistinguishable to the untrained eye.

A growing number of products which turn out to be copies, are being sent to dental equipment manufacturers with complaints about their performance or quality. Authentic items such as handpieces, which are especially widely counterfeited, are high-quality instruments developed by specialist manufacturers for professionals to use. The named brands are continually investing in research and development to ensure that they bring you innovations in handpieces so you can achieve the best treatment results safely – and this is reflected in the prices.

Cheaper, lower-quality copies can be bought online, but where quality is an issue, is it really worth staking a professional reputation for a price deal? The power and speed of a dental handpiece means it is critical that it is produced using high-quality materials and to a consistently high standard for durability and longevity: otherwise, you risk compromising the safety of your team and your patients.

Managing director of handpiece manufacturer W&H Sonia Tracey said:

“We use serial numbers and unique data matrix coding on each item, so can trace our products; dentists knowingly using illegal, non-compliant products risk both their patients' safety and their own professional registration.”

Managing director of NSK United Kingdom Ltd Alex Breitenbach agrees.

“Where you buy from, and the price that is charged, should be your first clue it may be a fake,” he said.

“Once the product is in your hand it's already too late to wonder whether it's not what it seems.”

The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has seized over 14,500 items since turning its attention to dental equipment, and the incidence is rising. Investigation-team leader at the MHRA Bruce Petrie has seen some shocking examples of items that not only break down almost immediately, but also are liable to disintegrate in the patient's mouth.

He has even seen a batch of x-ray equipment that used cheap kitchen foil instead of lead to block radiation.

However the counterfeiters are growing increasingly clever and sophisticated, Petrie warns.

“Recognising a fake just by looking at it is very hard,” he said.

“The time to suspect that an item is counterfeit or substandard is before you even purchase it. Check the chain of supply and look at where the product has come from. Websites can look very convincing but major manufacturers do not sell their products on eBay. *Caveat emptor* is entirely applicable here.”

The General Dental Council reinforces this advice and urges all registrants to: “carry out appropriate checks to ensure the products they are purchasing or commissioning are legitimate.”

The problem of counterfeiting has become so rife that the British Dental Industry Association (BDIA) has launched the Counterfeit and Sub-standard Instruments and Devices Initiative (CSIDI) to fight it, to protect its members, the profession and the general public. There is more information on the BDIA website (www.bdia.org.uk), and an easy way to report anything suspicious is through www.bdia.org.uk/device-reporting.

The key is to get to know your suppliers. BDIA members adhere to a strict code of practice, which can give dentists the confidence that the products they buy are of guaranteed quality and provenance.

The bottom line is to buy from reputable suppliers and know where your product is coming from. It is not worth risking your patients’ or staff’s safety – or your professional registration. Remember the adage: if the price is too good to be true – it probably is.

You can find trusted BDIA suppliers at www.bdia.org.uk

Chair of the BDA Mick Armstrong fully supports the initiative

“The BDA encourages all dentists to source equipment from legitimate, reputable manufacturers and suppliers who can demonstrate that the necessary legal requirements are being met. That will ensure both the quality of equipment purchased, and that dentists, their colleagues and patients are protected.”

Tips on spotting fakes

If you already have any equipment that you suspect might be substandard or fake, there are a couple of questions to ask yourself

- Did you pay a price that was drastically out of line with the normal price for the product?
- Did you buy it through an Internet dealer or supplier that you didn’t know?
- Now compare it with a similar product you know to be genuine
- Check the weight – copies made with cheap alloy are often much lighter
- Finish – look for rough edges or poor-quality laser etching
- Has the item failed in use? Some substandard hand instruments have bent or even broken when put under some pressure
- Has the item been supplied with a UK charging/power plug – not a Chinese or European plug with adapter? If not, it is non-compliant
- Look at the CE mark – there usually is one, but are you sure it is genuine, or even the correct one?
- The paperwork – if it is in a huge number of languages, including Chinese, this can be a clue that it is a copy.

Key signs to spot a fake



1. General manufacturing quality – poorer quality materials used, poorly machined threads, etc
2. Different design on cartridge, head cap, grooves on body
3. Quality and design of laser marking – here the layout, size and colour are all very different from the genuine item. The CE marking is of course completely worthless!



Photographs courtesy of NSK



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