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Killer Discounts: Protecting Employees from Dangerous Online Drugs

The lure of expensive luxury items leads millions of people worldwide to participate in the counterfeit goods trade. Typically purchased in downtown districts from street vendors or by friendly exchange, the most popular items include designer handbags, software, jewelry and DVDs. Considered harmless by some shoppers, knockoffs are serious business for companies that are at risk of losing billions of dollars, not to mention their brand identity to bootleggers. Even more serious is the growing trend of fake pharmaceuticals in the counterfeit industry. Unlike an imitation Gucci bag or a phony Rolex, these knockoffs could be hazardous to your health. Rogue Internet pharmacies originating from the United States and United Kingdom are the primary



culprits.¹ With the increasing need for multiple, often expensive, prescription drugs, purchasing medicine from online shops offering deep discounts - up to 75 percent in some cases - may be too tempting to refuse.² The phenomenon is an important topic for employers who may have workers looking for deals on their prescription medications. By arming your workforce with the facts about online pharmacies, you may be able to help keep your employees healthy by helping them avoid the risk of dangerous online drugs.

This past summer, the San Francisco-based company MarkMonitor, a leader in enterprise brand protection, released their quarterly Brandjacking Index™, which investigates trends and measures the effect of online threats to brands. The report indicated that online scammers increasingly abused the top-ranked brands and endangered consumers by selling questionable prescription drugs through dubious online pharmacies. "It is clear that a broad spectrum of people are targeted," said Frederick Felman, chief marketing officer for

MarkMonitor. "The undereducated surfer will have difficulty differentiating the legitimate sites from the illegal ones."

Counterfeit drugs, as described by the World Health Organization (WHO), are products that are deliberately and fraudulently mislabeled with respect to identity and/or source.³ One in every 10 pharmaceutical drugs is a counterfeit, according to the WHO. These imitation drugs are not to be confused with generic medicines, which are defined by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) as identical or the bioequivalent to a brand name drug. Some knockoffs are surprisingly accurate in their appearance, but the devil is in the details.

The contents of fake pills can range from harmless items, such as chalk, to powerful chemicals meant to produce adverse physiological effects. For bogus websites that sell the most popular brands, the report revealed that the majority operate without proper credentials and lack even the most basic e-commerce security features, risking customers' health and personal information. The National Association of Boards of

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Killer Discounts: Online Drugs

Pharmacy (NABP) states that fake drugs are on the rise because of: (1) the growing involvement in the drug supply chain of under-regulated wholesalers and re-packagers; (2) the proliferation of Internet pharmacies; and (3) the increased importation of foreign medicines.⁴

Counterfeiters know they are committing a crime and aggressively seek to avoid detection according to the WHO's International Medical Products Anti-Counterfeiting Taskforce. "Rogue online pharmacies have gone to great lengths to prove themselves as legitimate," Felman added. They develop

elaborate schemes to disguise their activities, exploiting weaknesses in border control and using false documents to obtain essential active pharmaceutical ingredients, as well as manufacturing equipment, to replicate genuine products, the WHO reports. Their actions disguise the extent of crime and makes detection and reporting extremely difficult.

The FDA is finding ways to help crack down on this phenomenon by supporting new technologies, developing stricter licensing requirements, applying tougher penalties and educating the public,

among other methods. For tips on safe online shopping, visit <http://vita.workcare.com>. Requests for the Brandjacking Index can be made by contacting Te Smith at Te.Smith@markmonitor.com.

References:

^{1,2} MarkMonitor. Brandjacking Index.
For a copy, please email te.smith@markmonitor.com

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