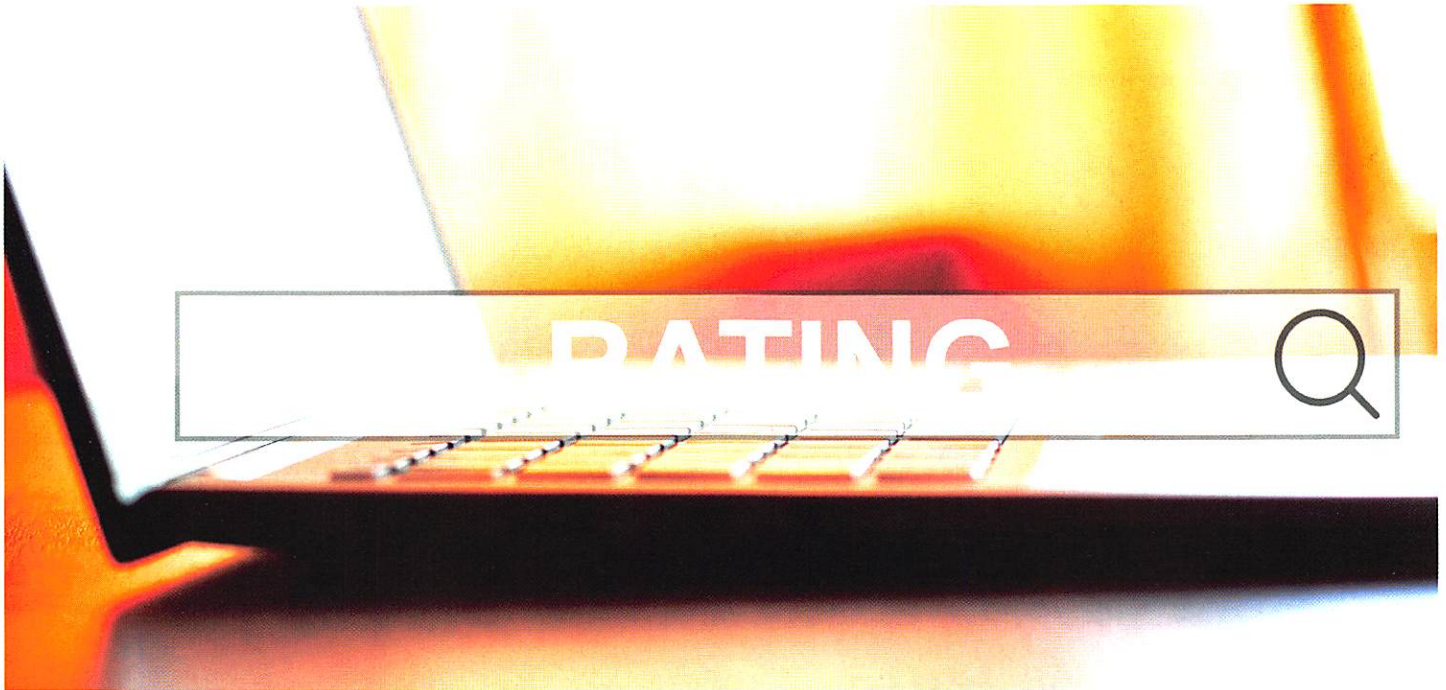


FTC tells advertisers: No more fake product reviews



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Before you decide to spend money, especially on costly items, you may want to know what other buyers have to say about the products.

Unfortunately, endorsements used in advertising are not always truthful. Some companies post fake reviews of their own products, and some product users are paid to write a positive review.

The Federal Trade Commission put businesses, advertising agencies and leading retailers on notice that endorsements used to sell products must reflect the actual experience and opinions of real people who used that product. Companies who use deceptive practices in the future can face penalties of up to \$43,792 per violation.

Under the FTC notice, a company can face significant penalties if it:

- Misrepresents that an endorser is an actual, current or recent user of a product
- Misrepresents that endorsers' experiences represent typical experiences

- Uses an endorsement without good reason to believe the endorser still holds the views expressed
- Uses an endorsement to make deceptive claims about how a product performs
- Fails to disclose an unexpected relationship between the endorser and advertiser, like a business or family relationship or a payment for a free product.

When shopping for a product or service, evaluate reviews carefully. What do you know about the reviewer or the site where you're reading the reviews? Look at more than one source. A good place to start is with well-known websites that have credible and impartial reviews by experts.

When using online reviews to make a purchasing decision, it pays to take time to look closely at the reviews, as well as the website where they're posted.

The Federal Trade Commission offers these tips to evaluate online reviews:

- **What is the time frame for the review?**
A large number of reviews over a short period of time can be a sign the reviews are fake.
- **Did the reviewer write other reviews?**
If not, this account may have been created to write one review for one product, indicating that it may be fake.
- **Fake reviews are not always positive.**
A company may post negative product reviews to harm a competitor.