

## **Before You Order Your Prom or Bridal Gown Online.... Beware!**

You've searched hours, weeks or even months online scanning dozens of websites for your dream dress. Then you find a site with fantastic prices that beat the competition. The site features the same photos of dresses from designers that you recognize and respect. But the prices are half – or even less. Better yet, they offer to custom make your dress to fit your measurements instead of buying an off-the rack size.

Sound too good to be true? Well, then it probably is! If you're tempted to order a dress online and the price is super cheap, think again. The Internet is recently flooded with hundreds of websites selling knock-offs dresses. Instead of getting an authentic designer dress at a ridiculously low price, what you risk getting is a cheap counterfeit version coming to you directly from a factory in China.

Delivery to your home can take up to 30 days or longer and might not reach you in time for your event... and that's if you even receive your order at all.

If you do get a dress from a knock-off site, it may or may not look like the picture on their website. The Chinese factories behind the slick websites are using the designers' copyrighted photos without permission. But the counterfeit sites lack the original patterns needed to sew the dresses. Instead, they try to duplicate them based on the photo taken by the original designer. As a result, a lot of guess work goes into the dress when it comes to construction, fabric and embellishments like beading and lace.

Do you really want to leave your once-in-a-lifetime-event prom dress or wedding dress to chance?

### **Here's how to spot a website selling knock-offs or counterfeit dresses:**

- ❑ If designers are named on a website, find that designer's website. Then check the Store Locator for a list of retailers authorized to sell their dresses. If the website/store is not listed, then beware that they are not selling true designer gowns.
- ❑ The Contact Us page should have a phone number and address listed (preferably within the US), not just an email, for customer service. If the site has a phone number or address in China, that's a red flag. It might be difficult to contact them about your order given the time difference and the language barrier. Some U.S. phone numbers merely forward the calls to China so ask where you are calling.
- ❑ If the website claims that you can return the dress for a full refund you can be fairly certain that this is a China website. In most cases, Authorized Retailers for these dresses cannot take returns unless the merchandise has a factory defect. Many people who order from the counterfeit websites are not able to get refunds either unless the item is shipped back to China which can be very costly.
- ❑ The websites requests more than a few of your body measurements. Professional dress and bridal shops in the USA typically rely on three to four key measurements as provided on size charts created by the designers.
- ❑ If the models heads are cropped off in the photos, this could be an attempt to try to disguise copyrighted photos the counterfeit sites are using without the permission of the designers.

- Before placing your order directly from a Chinese counterfeit website please understand: · You may not be able to get a refund if the dress you ordered arrives not as pictured.
- If you are required to return the dress to China to get your refund, the shipping can be costly (\$50-150 or more). Whether or not you will actually get your refund is not certain. You may end up with no dress and no money.
- Your local bridal and prom stores have no connection to these sites and can not help you with a refund. These dresses are only copies and the original designers or stores who sell them are in no way responsible for defective or poor construction.
- The American Bridal and Prom Industry Association (ABPIA) has just won a lawsuit against these counterfeit websites. Homeland Security and U.S. Customs will now work with the Temporary Restraining Order that ABPIA received in a federal court in N.J. and shipping companies such as Fedex, UPS and DHL could begin seizing packages with dresses that arrive at U.S. Customs that have shipped from China labeled as "samples" so that the American consumer can avoid paying the customs duties and taxes that are legally required. Your order could be one of the packages that are seized by the shipping companies and you may never receive it at all or be required to pay the taxes due before it's forwarded on to you.
- Consumers ordering merchandise directly from China are hurting American businesses who are facing loss of business resulting in layoffs of many American workers by stores and their suppliers. The ABPIA is determined to continue to effort to fight these counterfeiters so that the bridal and prom industry stays intact.