

Photo Tip Of The Week

“Gray Market” vs. Official “U.S.” Imports

I am sure that many of you are like me in that you want the best equipment at the bare minimum of costs.

If not free.

The old saying “Nothing in life is free” is true in most cases. However, an even more ominous saying is also true. “You get what you pay for!”

The photo industry is a thriving, multi-billion dollar a year market. The photo industry is one that can be an expensive profession, or hobby, if you want the best of everything. Most of us at one time or another had to make a decision between what costs too much, and when we are willing to pay up no matter what cost is associated with that one widget you just had to have.

So where does all of this photographic equipment come from?

If your camera equipment isn't manufactured in the U.S. it is therefore imported. Imported equipment comes into the United States two ways: imported by an authorized manufacturer or through what is called the “Gray Market”.

What is the “Gray Market”?

First one must understand how imported equipment is normally imported and sold. An overseas or foreign manufacturer usually has a distributor importing their equipment for sale in the U.S. This distributor in turn sells the equipment to a dealer, such as your local camera store, who will then sell it to you or whoever wants to buy that equipment.

This is the normal process of bringing goods to market. However, the more layers or hands that equipment goes through before it hits the market the higher the cost that is passed on to you.

The “Gray Market” eliminates the distributor. What is also eliminated is just as important, too. Usually when you find a product listed in a photographic trade publication such as “Popular Photography®” you will see two prices that can be significantly different. There is reason for this price disparity. One price is the normal U.S. off-the-shelf price and one is the “Gray Market” price. For the most part the equipment is identical in part number and quality and that is the reason that many people routinely purchase “Gray Market” equipment with no qualms about the shortcomings.

What are usually missing with “Gray Market” equipment are the warranty, manuals, the packaging and many of the normal accessories you would have received if you didn't buy that item on the “Gray Market”.

Many manufacturers refuse to fix equipment that becomes inoperable if purchased on the “Gray Market” or charges fees for repair that may exceed what a buyer may have originally paid for an item.

If you want to make sure you aren't buying a “Gray Market” item call the manufacturer of the item under consideration and ask if the dealer in which you are using is a reputable dealer. Also, ask if the dealer will honor the warranty.

So, the old adage, “Buyer Beware” is alive and well.