

How to Remove False, Defamatory Complaints.com Posts

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CLIENT ALERT | 3.9.2015

Businesses have a lot to gain from positive online reviews. Even a business that has overall strong reviews, however, can suffer if a disgruntled person publishes a false and defamatory post. Complaints.com is one website where businesses can become victims of internet defamation, and the website's header – which reads “CONSUMERS IN CONTROL” – implies the difficulty of a business's internet reputation being in the hands of other persons.

As the Complaints.com Terms and Conditions state, Complaints.com is “intended to be a place ... for consumers and businesses to exchange information about products and services, hopefully in a constructive and meaningful way.”

While this may be the overriding goal of the website, as with other complaint and review-based websites, many bad actors do use Complaints.com to disparage businesses and their professionals, which can significantly harm those parties.

Complaints.com prohibits defamation

If a poster of a false and defamatory complaint on Complaints.com were to read the website's Terms and Conditions, he or she would know that the type of post is disallowed. Per the “Member Conduct” section, members (noting that it is necessary to register with Complaints.com prior to posting a complaint) agree not to:

- “**Defame**, abuse, harass, stalk, threaten or otherwise violate the legal rights (such as rights of privacy and publicity) of others” and
- “Publish, distribute or disseminate any inappropriate, profane, **defamatory**, infringing, obscene, racist, indecent or unlawful material or information.”

And as is the case with many false online reviews and complaints, disgruntled parties such as competitors or ex-employees often pose as customers. But Complaints.com also prohibits the creation of “a false identity for the purpose of misleading others,” instead requiring factual firsthand customer experiences.

Although Complaints.com does not have quite the domain authority of Ripoff Report (50/100 vs. 82/100 per Open Site Explorer), what still makes false and defamatory complaints published on the site potentially more harmful than similar complaint websites is that – much like Ripoff Report – each post receives its own webpage that is indexed by search engines.

In contrast to Ripoff Report, however, there are legitimate deletion options.

Defamation removal options from Complaints.com

For starters, any author of a Complaints.com post can edit or delete his or her complaint. Obviously that is easier said than done, since false and defamatory internet posts are typically published anonymously; though there are plenty of instances in which a harmful post can be linked to a known person based on the surrounding context.

On Complaints.com, businesses can post responses to complaints and try to resolve the issues, so a business could potentially persuade the author of a false and defamatory complaint to edit or remove the post. More realistically, however, a business might need to issue a subpoena to Sagacity Corporation, the Illinois-based owner and operator of Complaints.com, in order to identify a complaint's author to pursue removal.

Accordingly, a subpoenaing party will want to request personally identifying information including an email address (required for Complaints.com account registration); first and last name and address information (optional for registration); and internet protocol (IP) addresses used to create the account in question and post on the website.

If a business is able to identify the author of a false and defamatory Complaints.com post, ideally that business will be able to persuade the author to remove the complaint in question.

Alternatively, Complaints.com “does not knowingly allow incorrect or factually incorrect information to remain posted” on the website, and it is willing to entertain court orders: “If Complaints.com is instructed to remove and delete a posted message by a U.S. Court,” Complaints.com’s Terms and Conditions reads, “then the message will be removed and deleted.”

Of course, a potential court order will actually be against the author of the complaint and not the website, but Complaints.com is likely to nonetheless remove the false content.

Should a Complaints.com post be deleted, whether by the author or by the website’s administrators, that information may continue to appear in search indexes, however. In this situation, a removal request would need to be submitted to the search engines, such as Google.

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