

How to Remove Harassment, Other Harmful Internet and Social Media Postings

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Minutes, if not seconds, is all it takes for someone to cause harm to another person on the internet. Whether a single posting on social media or another online forum, or a full-fledged harassment campaign consisting of numerous postings on various platforms, it is extremely easy today to cause damage to another's reputation online.

Whether pure internet defamation or more traditional harassment – such as wrongful impersonations or spamming – working to get the content removed is generally the best solution.

Of course, the larger and wider an online harassment campaign spreads, the greater potential there can be to prove damages and maybe even get law enforcement involved – something they are often reluctant to do.

Online defamation and harassment is, of course, not limited to individuals. But this post will generally refer to individuals.

Defamation

When it comes to internet defamation and getting such defamatory content removed, oftentimes this requires a court order – whether for getting something removed from a website directly, such as Ripoff Report, or from search engines.

Of course, there are some exceptions. For instance, when the author of a false and defamatory post is known or has been identified and it is possible to remove the content, he or she might be willing to remove it – perhaps in response to a cease and desist letter or other negotiations.

In terms of approaching a website, a defamed party should anticipate, however, that a court order will be required. It is possible to contact a website, point to a terms of service violation (such as defamatory content being prohibited), and getting them to remove the defamation. However, more often than not, the website will say it has

no way of knowing what is true and false in a particular dispute and that it does not want to be the judge.

But providing a court order (demonstrating that a court has already determined the content in question to be defamatory) and crafting a compelling argument is usually sufficient for removal.

Other Attacks, Harassment

In general, websites are reluctant to restrict speech and remove content absent a good faith basis for removal. After all, it is easy to imagine that a Facebook or Twitter, for instance, receives countless reports per day, many of them not worth their time.

Of course, sometimes people go to such great lengths to harm another and the harassment is so egregious that a website will willingly comply with an email request or submission through their site.

In these situations, the harmed party (or their attorney) – no matter how obvious it might be to an objective party that the content should be removed – will still want to craft a compelling argument as to why the content should be considered for removal. Strong facts (but not more information than necessary) and politeness generally help.

Each website handles things differently. For instance, Twitter requires people to use its specific online reporting form, whereas other websites may be best approached through email.

Here is a quick rundown of how to report online attacks/harassment to various popular websites (via desktop websites, though reporting mechanisms should be similar on mobile sites or apps).

- **Facebook:** To report a post, a Facebook user must make a selection from the dropdown menu to the right of the post (a downward-facing arrow). Specifically, he or she might click “It’s spam,” after which he or she can report a fake account; or, he or she might indicate that it is “Something else,” such an insult or attack based on religious, ethnicity or sexual orientation or perhaps a post that shows gore.
- **LinkedIn:** The most common type of harassment on LinkedIn is presumably a person publishing a fake profile for another person. To report a fake profile, the reporting party should go to the specific account and to the right of the profile picture is “Send a message,” “Endorse,” and then a downward-facing arrow. Upon clicking the arrow, there is an option for “Block or report,” after which a box can be checked to report the account, which LinkedIn will review.
- **Pinterest:** Pinterest expressly states it is willing to remove bullying and harassment of private individuals. The preferred method is to flag a particular pin (there is a flag icon) and click through the various options, such as “This is spam” or “This goes against Pinterest’s policies” (and then select subsequent other default options). In general, this should lead to a solution, as Pinterest is fairly quick to act on reported pins. If reporting abuse personally or on behalf of a client for a fake profile/impersonation, it might be necessary to provide identification (i.e. a driver’s license) for the harmed party.
- **Twitter:** Reporting a Twitter account involves clicking a “gear” symbol, rather than an arrow, which allows someone to select “Report” and then similarly go through a menu of options. Here, the reporting party will likely want to select “They’re being abusive or harmful” and then provide additional information – either: A) “Pretending to be me or someone else” or B: “Engaging in harassment or violence.” To report a tweet, click the ellipses (...) and it will take you through a similar process.

- **WordPress:** When it comes to defamation, WordPress can be contacted at court-orders@wordpress.com with a court order. As far as more general harassment or abuse, this is not as well-defined, partially because its terms of service are fairly general and do not have the traditional prohibitions of abusive or harassing content. Nonetheless, a WordPress website can be reported for abuse at <https://en.wordpress.com/abuse/>, through which a reporting party can explain the reasoning for the report. As mentioned, if the content is so egregious (or at least when combined with harassment from many other websites), WordPress will likely consider suspending the website.

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