Publications

How to Deal with Harmful Wikipedia Pages and Content

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Wikipedia is home to more than 30 million articles and has nearly 80,000 active contributors, according to the website. These figures are a product of its "openly editable model," where virtually anyone with internet access can add or edit content on the website. The online encyclopedia's strength relies in its founders giving their power to the people, but in doing so they opened the door to abuse.

When it comes to protecting the reputations of the subjects of its articles, Wikipedia holds its contributors responsible for ensuring content is not defamatory. Wikipedia's policy is to delete libelous material upon discovery. Its present system, with thousands of active writers and editors, is generally effective when it comes to filtering out harmful content.

The important thing to remember is that Wikipedia is most concerned with the existence of reliable sources. If content is poorly sourced – and if it is false, it probably is – one of the many contributing editors will likely notice it and quickly remove that information. Alternatively, self-removal is an easy solution, as anyone registered with Wikipedia can make changes to a page.

However, when possibly harmful information is well sourced, it is more difficult to remove. In this situation, one would have to prove that the source material is actually false. Accordingly, a similar approach can be taken to that discussed in our recent Ripoff Report article: obtaining a court order that states that the source material, wherever it may be located, contains false or defamatory information.

When discussing removal, it is ordinarily a single statement within a page that is at issue. In very limited circumstances, however, an entire page can be removed.

Wikipedia's standard page deletion process – which we have used to assist clients – requires a multi-step "deletion discussion" to be held between members of the Wikipedia community, where a consensus must be reached regarding whether a page should be deleted. Reasons for deletion include copyright violations; "vandalism" pages

solely intend to disparage their subjects; redundant or conflicting articles on the same subject; articles lacking reliable sources; and articles that run counter to Wikipedia's living persons biography policy.

Of course, the deletion discussion can be burdensome, and often ineffective, when attempting to remove an entire page. However, Wikipedia does have a quicker page removal mechanism, which is known as "speedy deletion." To qualify for speedy deletion, a page must meet one or more of the Wikipedia criteria, which includes:

- Pure vandalism, or obvious misinformation;
- Re-creation of a page previously deleted through the deletion discussion process;
- Good faith requests by the actual author; and
- Disparaging, threatening, or intimidating pages, that serve exclusively to harass its subjects.

Alternatively, "proposed deletion" may be pursued where the speedy deletion criteria cannot be met, but the deletion is nevertheless unlikely to be uncontroversial.

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