

Publications

How to Remove Search Results Linking to False and Defamatory Content

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Colleen M. Devanney

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When people want to learn about a product, service, company or professional, they often go straight to the internet. And, unsurprisingly, a large percentage of people are going directly to search engines.

According to PwC's [2015 Total Retail Survey](#), of the more than 19,000 people the company surveyed worldwide, 56 percent of them indicated the first thing they do in researching a product is go to a search engine.

Certainly people (including the authors of this article) are turning to search engines just as often, if not more, when researching a company of professional of interest.

The frequency with which people are searching companies (and individuals) makes a company's online search results—particularly its first page—function like a brick-and-mortar “storefront.” In other words, a company's top search results can form the basis of many people's first impressions about it.

Accordingly, it is critical that companies—particularly midsize or smaller companies whose reputations are most vulnerable online—maintain positive search results, to the extent possible.

In other words, companies can ill-afford to have harmful content rank highly; otherwise, it will dissuade prospective customers and other key parties like potential investors or employees from working with them.

Addressing false content appearing in search results

Certainly, a number of negative online reviews can adversely affect a company.

But as we have noted in our various posts about [how to handle online reviews](#), it is necessary to distinguish between a simple negative (opinion-based) review and actual online defamation.

Unlike pure opinion, false and defamatory content is not protected and may be declared unlawful by a court. Accordingly, there are options to get defamation removed from the internet, including from search

results, which is significant for the reasons stated above.

Below is a list of several websites on which false postings about companies and professionals have a tendency to cause harm due to their ability to rank highly in search results. Each website is accompanied by a brief overview on potential options for removal of defamation from the search engines and, where possible, the websites themselves.

Additionally, next to each website is a number indicating its Moz.com “Domain Authority,” or predictor of the root domain’s ranking potential (out of 100).

Note that removal of content from the internet is often a complex process. Thus, it is important to recognize that each of the below descriptions contains a very simplified overview of the process of dealing with false content published on the websites.

RipoffReport.com (73): As we have mentioned numerous times on our blog, Ripoff Report is troubling for many companies and professionals because the website never deletes users’ postings – even those subject to a court order. It is, however possible to get a court to declare statements on Ripoff Report to be unlawful and, therefore, request that Google remove the URLs containing the offending content from its Google.com search results. It is important to remember that: 1) obtaining a court order involves filing a legitimate lawsuit against the poster of the unlawful statements (not Ripoff Report) and following standard litigation procedures, and 2) such a court order would, therefore, be against the author of the statements and not Google; thus, Google is not actually legally obligated to comply with the order. Nevertheless, this process can result in **removal of the Ripoff Report URLs** from the search results. Also note that in certain circumstances, such as when both the plaintiff and a named defendant sign an agreed order, Ripoff Report might be willing to redact certain factually false statements from its website.

PissedConsumer.com (57): Pissed Consumer offers **two primary removal options**: 1) a court order and 2) a notarized letter from the author of the harmful statements, which is effectively an affidavit in which the author of a posting admits to posting incorrect information and is now seeking removal of the content. Generally, Pissed Consumer will entertain legitimate court orders and remove posts containing statements declared unlawful by a court. Pissed Consumer somewhat recently began offering an arbitration-like procedure that can also result in removals. If Pissed Consumer removes any content, under any of these options, the content will eventually drop out of the search results.

ComplaintsBoard.com (52): Similarly, ComplaintsBoard.com is generally **amenable to removing content** in response to a valid court order. The website has somewhat recently transitioned to handling issues on an online support center, through which users can submit “tickets” and upload attachments such as court orders (along with accompanying explanations). As with Pissed Consumer postings, once content is deleted from ComplaintsBoard.com, it will eventually drop out of the search results.

Outscam.com (34) and **Scamorg.com** (17): Oftentimes, the victims of false and defamatory Ripoff Report postings will find the content **published verbatim on other websites**, whether or not the original authors actually went and published the same statements elsewhere. Outscam and Scamorg are two websites, in particular, that seem to frequently contain identical content as Ripoff Report postings (though people can publish original content on these websites). These two websites, which appear to be affiliated with each other, have been known to ask for large sums of money in exchange for removal. Accordingly, the best

option is to have a court declare the statements located at these URLs to be unlawful—as described in the Ripoff Report section above—and then, if the court agrees, submit the URLs in a removal request to Google (which is, again, not obligated to make the removals, but may do so if approached properly).

As stated, each of these blurbs provides a simplification of the actual removal processes. However, we have written more in-depth about dealing with defamation on each of these websites, as contained in posts found through the above hyperlinks.

For more information, contact Colleen Devanney at 855.542.9192 or cmdevanney@vorys.com. Read more about the practice at <http://www.defamationremovalattorneys.com/>.