Identifying and Nailing the Online Defamer

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Whitney Gibson, an attorney in the Vorys Cincinnati office, and Christopher Anderson, Ph.D., co-founder of Cyber Investigation Services, LLC, authored a column entitled "Identifying and Nailing the Online Defamer" for PR News. In the column, the authors outline common behaviors that can help public relations professionals identify an individual who is seeking to hurt a business online.

The column states:

"Online attacks are being instigated by not only disgruntled customers, but also by competitors, ex-employees and ex-business partners. Legitimate opinions of unhappy customers are protected speech, just as they should be. The cases in which we're assisting are ones in which attackers are bound and determined to hurt a particular company. The appropriate response should be determined by the type of attack. So how can you tell the difference?

Based on our experience, there are several ways to determine unhappy customer postings and those that are defamatory. Attacks typically include one of the following:

1. *The statements are known to be false;*

2. *The statements include outrageous, atypical accusations;*

3. *The reviews or posts are clustered in time. Your client will have few reviews and then suddenly there are 10 items in a single month, often from multiple anonymous screen names;*

4. *Your client has a good idea who the defamer is, even though he cannot prove it;*

5. *The material is causing harm. A single unhappy customer can leave a review that minimally impacts a business. Someone committed to significantly damaging a business will find ways to substantially harm it online."*

To read the entire column, please visit the PR News website.