



How to Contest Online Business Reviews

From the Office of Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison

Most businesses in today's marketplace rely on an online presence to expand their customer base. Many customers use online reviews to research companies they may be thinking of doing business with. The accuracy of online reviews may therefore be very important to the success of a business. Customers may sometimes post inaccurate reviews or mistakenly post reviews for the wrong business. When this happens, business owners are sometimes left with little recourse on how to challenge inaccurate reviews.

"Alice" owns a children's bookstore named "The Reading Nook." Alice's business regularly receives glowing reviews from its customers. Another children's bookstore, "The Reading Room," does not. Customers frequently post online reviews complaining about The Reading Room's poor customer service and high prices. Alice recently checked a business review website and found several negative reviews about The Reading Nook complaining about poor customer service and high prices. Alice believes the reviews are meant for The Reading Room. Alice does not know how to address the reviews and is concerned current or potential customers will read the inaccurate reviews and take their business elsewhere. By taking the following steps, Alice was able to contest the reviews and address potential customers' concerns.

If you are a business owner and unsure how to contest an online review, you are not alone. Federal law provides broad immunity to websites that allow the posting of online reviews, as long as the website itself does not create or alter the content of the reviewers' posts. This Office recently requested that the United States Congress

overturn such immunity so that website operators can be held to the same standards as others. Unfortunately, this immunity remains in place.

If you are concerned about online reviews of your business or want to contest an online review you believe is inaccurate or meant for another business, there are several steps you can take:

Step 1: Review the Website's Usage Guidelines

Most websites that allow users to post online reviews have usage guidelines that contain the website's policies for contesting reviews. Some websites allow business owners to contest reviews they believe are factually inaccurate. Other websites do not because they cannot verify or disprove the allegations in the reviews. Most websites allow business owners or other individuals to request removal of reviews that contain profane language, illegal or copyrighted content, hate speech, and personal or confidential information.

Step 2: Collect Information About the Inaccurate Review

If the website allows business owners to contest the factual basis for an online review, gather any documentation that supports your version of the events in question. These can be receipts, advertisements, correspondence, sales contracts, or any other applicable documents.

Step 3: Determine What You Want the Website To Do

If the website's usage guidelines allow you to contest an online review, decide what you want the website to do. Do you want the website to remove the review? Do you want the website to remove only part of the review? Do you want the website to correct certain information? Your complaint will be the most effective if you are clear with the website about what you want.

Step 4: Post a Response

Most business review websites allow business owners to post responses to customers' reviews. If you believe an online review contains inaccurate information, you may wish to post a response that addresses the customer's concerns. Do not include any personal information about the customer or extraneous information that does not address the customer's complaint. Keep it business-like and professional.

Step 5: Monitor Websites for Posts About Your Business

Some business owners monitor websites for negative or inaccurate reviews. Most websites allow business owners to ask to receive notifications when a review is posted about his or her business. Check if websites offer this service. If the website does not, you may be able to set up alerts through your own email server or other online program. Many business owners set up alerts for the top two or three websites used by their customers in order to address inaccurate reviews as soon as possible.

You may contact the Office of Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison for additional information.

