

MEDIA MENTION

David Weslow Discusses New York Investigation of Fake Online Ratings

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David E. Weslow, a partner in Wiley Rein's Intellectual Property Practice, was quoted by *U.S. News & World Report* in an article yesterday about penalties levied by New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman's office on 19 companies implicated in false online rating behavior.

Under the guise of owning a yogurt shop, the attorney general's office solicited help from search engine optimization and online marketing companies to grow its visibility and improve its ratings on sites like Yelp, Google Local, and CitySearch. Over the course of a year many deceptive techniques were employed by the consultant firms, including creating fake reviews and paying for ratings from overseas users.

The fines—which targeted multiple companies for a combined total of \$350,000—were directed at businesses and the online services they had hired to help improve their online profiles through the use of fake reviews. The investigation's success raises the risk that companies trying to game the online reputation system could face lawsuits from competitors, or an investigation by an attorney general or the Federal Trade Commission, Mr. Weslow said.

"This appears to be the largest investigation of its kind, since many online ratings investigations involve a single company," Mr. Weslow said. "I think consumers will become increasingly aware of websites that are not doing a good job of screening for fake reviews. It's remarkable that it's just as easy to purchase a fake review as it is to purchase 1,000 Twitter followers, or 1,000 Facebook 'likes.'"

Related Professionals

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