

## Publications

### How to Deal with Extortionists Threatening Bad Reviews, Other Online Reputation and Brand Attacks

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Whitney C. Gibson

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Increasingly today, “extortionists” – given the significance of online reviews – are threatening businesses with potential harmful reviews or posting other damaging content online. For instance, if a business does not give that person a refund, produce replacement, or discount, he or she could make good on a promise to harm the company online.

As part of preventing online reputation and brand attacks, businesses should evaluate their customer service policies and factor in the potential damage a disgruntled party could cause them online. This should include having a plan in place for dealing with these extortionists.

#### *Trained and Experienced Representatives*

In order to deal with these threats, businesses will want to ensure that they have managers or employees trained and experienced in dealing with such persons designated to handle these threats. If and when these threats do occur, employees should know to notify the designated representatives who can take over the communications with the threatening parties.

It is important that these threats are taken seriously and handled by the appropriate persons, because those making these threats often do have the capability of causing serious damage to the businesses online; plus, they very well might carry out the threatened actions.

Besides, law enforcement officers are unlikely to get involved, so it is important to handle these situations well.

#### *Handling Threats*

As discussed in other posts, the optimal solution when faced with a threat or actual online reputation or brand attack is typically fact-dependent. Accordingly, if someone makes a threat, a quick evaluation of the situation must be done to gather facts about the threat and the person making it.

Following the fact-gathering process, the trained and experienced representative can decide the best approach, which will not be easy without advanced planning.

For what appear to be insignificant threats, designated representatives may wish to: 1) hold their ground and communicate their companies' policies; 2) state they do not give into blackmails; and 3) their company may wish to send cease and desist letters communicating that they will respond aggressively to extortion.

Meanwhile, if the threat is significant, trained individuals might actually consider agreeing to give the threatening persons what they request. To avoid this opening the door to others learning of the companies giving into the threats and making their own similar demands of the companies, having extortionists sign a confidentiality agreement can be effective.

It is an absolute must that businesses be able to recognize how to address these threats. Without sounding too dramatic, these can be dangerous situations, to the point that a business can be significantly harmed by an ignored extortionist following through with his or her threat.

As solutions are fact-dependent and responses require judgment calls, businesses must have plans in place for escalating threats to persons trained and experienced in how to handle them.

*For more information, contact Whitney Gibson at 855.542.9192 or [wcgibson@vorys.com](mailto:wcgibson@vorys.com). Read more about the practice at <http://www.defamationremovalattorneys.com> and follow @WhitneyCGibson on Twitter.*