60-second summary

Online Reviews: letting your customers see the true picture

CMA
Competition & Markets Authority

In 2016, the CMA took action against an online marketing company that posted fake reviews on behalf of its clients.

The company wrote fake reviews on behalf of small businesses from a wide variety of sectors and posted them on different websites.

Online reviews play an important role in helping potential customers decide whether to buy a product or service. Writing or commissioning fake reviews could lead to civil or criminal action. Once discovered, it can also damage the image of the brand and erode customers' trust in reviews and review sites.

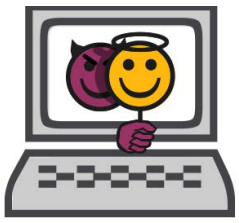
What do you need to do if you are a business whose products are being reviewed?

- Don't pretend to be a customer and write reviews about your products or other businesses' products
- Don't commission third parties to write fake reviews – you may be liable for their actions
- If you are working with a third party – such as a PR, marketing or SEO agency – make sure they also follow these rules
- Don't offer inducements - money or gifts - to customers to write positive reviews about your business

What do you need to do if you are a PR, marketing or Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) company working on behalf of someone else?

- Don't write or arrange fake reviews on behalf of your clients – both you and your client risk breaking the law
- Ensure that your staff are adequately trained and your contracts, internal policies, corporate brochures and other related materials accurately reflect the requirements of the law
- Inform your clients that fake reviews are against the law

If reviews you write or commission mislead consumers, you may be breaking the law.



Why is this important?

Our research estimates that more than half of UK adults use online reviews.

Businesses that mislead consumers may be in breach of the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008

Where can I find more information?

- Consumer Protection Regulations
- Business Companion

See all of the CMA's latest work around online reviews and endorsements here:

bit.ly/CmaOnlineReviews

These materials do not constitute legal advice and should not be relied upon as such.