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Business owner sues over online review

Expects Google to reveal the poster's name

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AUSTIN (KXAN) - A Pflugerville business owner has filed a lawsuit against a woman who he said made a false allegation against him on the Internet site, Google Places.

Gary Kulp of Austin Gutter King is also suing Google to find out the true identity of the woman.

In March and November of last year, a woman calling herself Norma Lee posted the same review. It said, "We are a small firm that conducts research into fraudulent customer reviews posted by shady businesses. Whereas it does seem that Austin Gutter King is not necessarily a shady business, it DOES appear that they find it necessary to post fake customer reviews. ...it is HIGHLY unlikely that many of the customer service reviews you find posted about his merchant are legitimate."

"Anybody who would like to meet any of the people who posted the reviews, we're happy to give names and phone numbers," Kulp said. "And, that's why, again, we're so appalled that someone would impune us and say that our reviews are not legitimate."

The lawsuit alleges that what's not legitimate are Norma Lee and her firm. The lawsuit, which was filed by Austin law firm Taylor Dunham LLP, reads, "These comments were intended to do more than voice personal opinion. Rather, they were intended to harm the professional image of Austin Gutter King through the use of fictional people and facts asserted as being real."

"God, I hope it's not a competitor because that would be just so slimy," said Kulp.

Kulp is part of a growing trend of business owners who are fighting negative reviews. Recently, an Atlanta restaurant launched a Facebook and Twitter campaign attacking a customer who left a bad review.

The new owners of Austin's Hickory Street restaurant said they were also hit by unfair reviews when they reopened this year.

"We knew we'd be taking some of the baggage from the previous version of Hickory Street," said owner Mason Wheelless. "And so we had immediately several negative reviews just because we changed something or we kept the same name without people even trying the restaurant out."

Hickory Street's owners decided to simply work hard to change minds.

Kulp, however, said questioning the integrity of his company was just going too far. He said Google has removed the post that criticized Austin Gutter King, and he expects Google to release the identity of the person who wrote the negative review.

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