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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

AG Moody Takes Action to Stop Billing Scam



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody is taking action to stop a billing scam that appears to target small businesses. Attorney General Moody filed a lawsuit against United Directories, Inc. d/b/a Yellow Pages United and its owner Mark Smith. The Attorney General's complaint alleges that the defendants sent businesses throughout the country deceptive mailers intended to look like listing confirmation notices from the Real Yellow Pages. Instead, the notices were from United Directories, an obscure online business directory with no relation to the Real Yellow Pages that charges almost $800 a year for little or no value in return. According to the complaint, once the defendants tricked the businesses into signing up for the directory, United Directories automatically charged them twice a year.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "Florida businesses were unwittingly billed for services that they never knowingly ordered, and we are asking the court to stop the defendants from perpetrating this scam and provide restitution to the business owners harmed by these deceptive and unfair practices."

According to the Consumer Protection Division's investigation, the defendants' initial solicitation made use of familiar imagery and terminology resembling the Real Yellow Pages, inducing consumers into thinking United Directories is affiliated with or legitimately similar to the Real Yellow Pages directory. The company intentionally buried the cost of the directory in the fine print and on the back of the mailer where complainants reported they did not see it. Once the business confirmed its listing information on the solicitation or submitted corrected information, United Directories treated the returns as binding agreements for new listings in the directory and for automatic renewal of the listings.

The filed complaint seeks an injunction to end the defendants' deceptive and unfair business practices, restitution for harmed businesses, and disgorgement of any ill-gotten gains obtained by the defendants. United Directories and Mark Smith also face the possible assessment of civil penalties for violations of Florida's Deceptive and Unfair Trade Practices Act.

The Florida Attorney General's Office already filed a lawsuit against Global Directories, Inc. d/b/a US-Yellow in June 2018. Global is owned by Mark Smith's brother, Michael Smith. The Global litigation is ongoing.

To view the United Directories complaint, click here.