

Dear FTC,

I am a United States citizen and I am making these public comments out of years of frustration due to proliferation of websites which scrape public records.

I want to first let FTC know that I can within less than five minutes scrape (collect) the divorce records for ALL Americans and I can display them on one website and start selling Google Ads. I can make a million dollars daily by doing so. Most people do not know that it is very very easy to scrape/collect such information. However, I am not doing so or engaging in such a business because it is unethical and harassment of all Americans. While, I am not doing so, every now and then a software programmer gets up in the morning and he thinks he can make millions of dollars by copying public records and selling Google Ads.

So, what is wrong, who is doing the wrong thing, how can we stop them? What can or should FTC do about it?

What is wrong?

I understand that United States public records are not copyrighted, so, anybody can copy them. However, they should NOT be manipulated, distorted or sold with Google Ads. A good example is the copying of ALL United States business registration records by a company called Bozoos. This website has copied all records and now it displays "2 Arrest Records Found" misleading Ad all over our business registration record. When I signed my registration record, I never thought that it will be displayed on a private website with this text flashing "2 Arrest Records Found". We do not know who owns Bozoos. The person who owns Bozoos has used initials A.M. in his registration record and he used the address of his 'Registered Agent' to hide his office address.

You can see the irony here. The person who created Bozoos has taken ALL steps to hide his every bit of information, including using a false address and a false name (I think).

I am now worried and scared of starting a business, because there are such websites which will copy my record and display such inappropriate Ads.

Who is doing the wrong thing?

This is complicated because United States allows copying of public records. But, the question is, does United States allow people to manipulate public records by displaying "2 Arrest Records Found"?

In my State, the government website does not allow searching of public records by people's first or last name. Even Google has stayed away from searching public records. However, when a website like Bozoos copies our records and displays them on a private website, all of those records are now available on Google.

Another question is: Why are these websites appearing in Google search results? Does Google have a conflict of interest due to sales of Google Ads? If so, then the blame for proliferation of such websites should be placed on Google.

I personally think that Google Ads has created a new business model, which allows people to create such websites and sell Google Ads. In my opinion, we should ask

Google to not ALLOW selling of Ads and display of results related to such websites. Maybe, FTC should take action against Google for selling Ads to illegal websites or public record scraper websites. Maybe Google is displaying these websites in search results because they are making money by Google Ads.

How can we stop them?

It seems almost impossible to stop proliferation of these websites. I personally think that if Google was not selling Ads to these websites and not displaying their pages in search results, we could immediately stop these websites. I will request FTC to please probe this issue. If nothing else, I making a humanitarian pledge to Google CEO to please NOT sells Ads to these public record scraping websites. PLEASE!

Another way to stop them is to create laws for their disclosure regarding ownership and employees. It is interesting that there is ABSOLUTELY no information about any employee, owners or address for websites such as Bozoos, Inetlluos, Peoplefinders.com etc etc. If these websites are legal, why are their owners hiding their information? Is it possible FTC can ask them to list their owner information (Not as LLCs, but people's name). I am 100% sure that nobody will dare to create Bozoos like websites if they are required to display their owners name and address. Why did Bozoos use their registered Agent's address as their office address? Why did they use a name with initial A.M. as their officer?

Last possible way to stop them is to have laws for clear opt-out policy. However, this has also been abused. Some of these websites require us to send our Photo ID. Well, Why should I send my photo ID to a company which is 100% Anonymous? What if they steal my identity? How can some random website ask for my Photo ID? Why can't FTC make laws to prevent such websites from asking for our Photo IDs? To give you an example, Bozoos asks people to send them "notarized copy of Photo ID". Wow! This is harassment. Now, why should I send my photo ID to him? I did not need Photo ID for my business registration in my state.

Also, for some website even after opt-out, they start displaying our information few weeks later. Why are these companies not adhering to our permanent opt-out request?

Some of these websites are also popping up from countries which have NO laws like China, India, Russia etc. Recently, I saw a website called businessprofiles.com which copied US records and was hosted by someone in Saudi Arabia (I think). Another website is maryandcompanies.org, which was hosted in Russia or Czech Republic. It is almost impossible for us to take action against such off-shore websites. However, why is Google displaying these illegal websites in their search results? Why is Google selling Google Ads to a company businessprofiles.com in Saudi Arabia?

What can or should FTC do about these websites?

I personally think that we need to start with Google. FTC should probe why Google is selling Ads to such websites. Is there a conflict of interest, in terms of Google displaying these websites in search results?

Second, I think FTC should require these websites for full disclosure of their ownership, address and employees.

Third, the opt-out policy should be simple and easy. They should not be allowed to request our Photo ID or any ID.

Fourth, maybe FTC can help create laws to prevent display of Ads next or in the public records.

Fifth, maybe we can have one ALL opt-out page on FTC website, similar to telemarketing and credit card offer opt-outs?

[Bozoos is a made up name to avoid naming an existing website. However, I have real experience dealing with one such website]