

# Slated in the media - what are your rights?

 By [Marion Scher](#)

18 Sep 2012

Just why would your company get bad publicity in the media? After all, you offer your customers great service, good prices and are generally known as good guys - well, that is if you're not a government department or possibly a parastatal.

There are many reasons your name could be dragged through the media mud. For instance a disgruntled ex-employee with an axe or two to grind. A rival company that has it in for you. A current employee who complains about anything from sexual harassment to racism in the workplace.

Now it's all very well if indeed, you are guilty as charged. And if you know what the media has printed is true. If this is the case best be up front, admit you've made a mistake and do your best to correct any wrongdoings - fast!

As in the recent case of Woolworths and the now infamous employment ad, Woolworths were quick to respond to the media saying that yes, they had placed that ad and then went on to explain, logically, their reasons for doing so. They even went so far as to contact account holders directly and put up signs outside their shops.

## Beware of viral campaigns

Even in this short space of time people were already threatening to boycott their shops. Remember viral campaigns are deadly.

But occasionally a story appears that is patently untrue. Yes, a certain amount of damage will be done but if you stay silent a lot more damage will occur.

So what are your legal rights? Firstly if a patent untruth is written about a person or organisation and let's say it appears on the front page of a national newspaper, with a very large headline, what then?

Well, media law states that if - and I do say if - you have hard evidence to prove your innocence, then the newspaper concerned has to print a retraction. Now, this is the interesting part that not many people know about. **They have to print a retraction on the same page in the same place as the original story with the same size headline!**

## Go to the competition

Now some people may say, but I know that journalist and if I force this issue they'll just go right out and find another bad story about our company. Or they'll never print any of our releases or stories again. And yes, this can certainly happen.

What then? Well, if you feel fairly sure that journalist would do this then use another route to get the truth out. Send out the true story to every other similar publication, which will nine times out of ten be happy to show that their rival publication got it wrong!

Most of all be alert within your organisation as to the buzz around you and also make your staff aware that should it be found out that they have maligned another member of staff or the organisation unjustly the rewards in a defamation suit are no joke.

Should the media come to you with any accusation about the company or a staff member act immediately and decisively. Try to get to the bottom of the story as quickly as you can and cooperate with the media so they use *your* story and not their own. Also make them aware that you know your media law and will challenge any untrue story. You can even go to the Press Ombudsman.

No media organisation should even look at a story unless they have three independent sources offering concrete evidence on the same story. But sadly that's not always the case. And remember with Facebook and other viral media your reputation can be ruined in hours.

## ABOUT MARION SCHER

Marion Scher ([www.mediamentors.co.za](http://www.mediamentors.co.za)) is an award-winning journalist, lecturer, media trainer and consultant with 25 years' experience in the industry. For more of her writing, go to her Bizcommunity profile or to Twitter @marionscher.

- How to get your media release ignored - 12 Nov 2015
- Mmusi - Where are you? The country wants to hear from you! - 3 Nov 2015
- Be careful what you wish for - 7 Oct 2015
- Your speech - brilliant or boring - 2 Oct 2015
- Why you didn't even get an interview - 3 Sep 2015

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>