FALSE OPINIONS IN THE NETWORK - ACTIONS BY THE PRESIDENT OF UOKiK

* **"My opinion 5/5", "A company worth recommending", "I recommend wholeheartedly" - sounds familiar? Probably yes, if you read reviews when buying online. Unfortunately, they are not always true.**
* **The President of UOKiK charges two companies - Opinie.pro from Lubartów and SN Marketing from Kraków - with trafficking in fake reviews.**
* **Creating, soliciting and posting fake reviews online is punishable by a financial penalty of up to 10% of turnover. This is another action of the President of UOKiK on the Internet advertising market this year.**

**[Warsaw, 15 June 2022]** *Our activity is carried out fully anonymously, and care for discretion has been written into the company's policy... The service we offer consists in creating professional, positive reviews... It includes single and complex sentences, written in accordance with the rules of the Polish language* - this is how one of the entrepreneurs promoted their "marketing" services online. Our findings so far show that this entrepreneur offered to create fake reviews in bulk without any contact with the product or service being reviewed.

The President of UOKiK has been observing practices of this type of companies for several months, checking the rules of cooperation in the framework of the so-called whisper marketing or the service consisting in "guaranteeing original, reliable reviews". The information and evidence collected made it possible to bring charges of misleading consumers against two companies: **Opinie.pro** and **SN Marketing.** In both cases, the practice involves obtaining or creating and posting false reviews of products and services on major websites, such as Google, Google Maps, Facebook or Tripadvisor.

"*An entrepreneur's reputation should be based on truthful information and developed within the framework of fair market play. The actions of both companies distort the rules of fair play. False reviews can unfortunately give the wrong impression that they are real comments from people who have used the offer. They can therefore artificially inflate ratings and thus mislead customers into purchasing decisions which they would not have made if they had realised they were made up and bought. Such actions may distort the market behaviour of the average consumer",* explains Tomasz Chróstny, the President of UOKiK.

The majority of the recipients of services provided by both marketing agencies are entrepreneurs wishing to improve their online visibility and increase sales. Contractors settle up on the basis of issued invoices, without concluding written contracts. Trade in reviews takes place in bundles - 5, 10 or even 200 reviews. Both companies create or obtain reviews, the publication of which is not preceded by the testing of products or services. Initiated proceedings may result in decisions by the President of UOKiK, which can impose penalties for infringement of the collective interests of consumers of up to 10% of of turnover.

The current actions are part of a market analysis initiated last year. The research commissioned by the President of UOKiK shows that almost half of the respondents are afraid of being guided by false reviews when choosing a product. That is why a several months ago UOKiK informed about [actions taken against](https://uokik.gov.pl/news.php?news_id=17418) ceneo.pl and opineo.pl. At the time, the President of UOKiK's doubts were aroused by hiding some of the negative reviews and ratings and not taking them into account in the statistics when the seller made contact with the consumer. Both entrepreneurs reacted positively and changed the questioned practices. Currently the Office is also verifying the way reviews are presented by online shops and other platforms, as well as brokers, i.e. companies that acquire or create reviews on request.

**When using online reviews, check what to pay attention to:**

1. Reviews from people without profile pictures, from fictional accounts e.g. with photos of models, should make you wary.
2. Be sceptical if the review you read is part of a sudden increase in comments about a product or service.
3. Pay attention to the way reviews are written. Be wary of comments giving 5 stars, without a detailed description or very laconic comments e.g. "I can recommend", "great seller".
4. Ensure that the terms and conditions for posting and moderating reviews are clear and straightforward. In particular, who can provide a rating, whether it applies only to people who have made a purchase.
5. Avoid sellers who encourage only reviews with a specific content, e.g. positive.
6. If you are asked to give a review in return for a specific material or financial benefit - indicate that it is a comment after the receipt of an incentive. Also pay attention to whether the shop you are rating marks such reviews in a distinctive way.
7. If you are asked to give a review on a product you have not used - do not do so, or you will be taken advantage of by a dishonest entrepreneur.
8. Contact UOKiK if you repeatedly encounter manipulation of real reviews, e.g. by blocking or delaying publication of - usually negative comments - under the pretext of recognition of a problem.

**Remember:**

1. Fake reviews are created in the same way as real consumer reviews, but are written upon request, often in bulk. They can be both positive and negative, depending on the objective the brand wants to achieve.
2. Fake photos - like reviews - are misleading and their posting may be considered unlawful.
3. It is illegal for a seller to compile a set of comments and then have them posted online. In practice, it looks like the comments are pretending to be posted by different entities, from different accounts, when in fact they are being prepared by the seller or another entity at the seller's request.

**Consumer support:**

Phone: 801 440 220 consumer helpline
E-mail: porady@dlakonsumentow.pl
[Consumer Advocates](https://uokik.gov.pl/pomoc.php) – in your city or county
 [Regional Inspectors of Commercial Inspection](https://www.uokik.gov.pl/wazne_adresy.php#faq595)