Washington Attorney General claims Aussie pair became rich using sexy stories to sell bogus cures

Local News

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SEATTLE - The Washington State Attorney General's Office has ventured to the Land Down Under to stop a pair of Aussies from using sexy stories to sell bogus cures for diseases ranging from Lyme disease to cancer."Scammers who hide behind foreign borders aren't out of justice's reach," McKenna said. "This case is proof that we're willing to go the extra mile - or in this case, nearly 8,000 miles - to protect consumers."

The Attorney General's Office (AGO) believes that Leanne Rita Vassallo and Aaron David Smith, both of Cecil Hills, a suburb of Sydney, New South Wales, became millionaires while doing business online as Frog E-Guides and other names. Following an investigation by its Consumer Protection High-Tech Unit, the office filed a civil lawsuit today in King County Superior Court, accusing the defendants of violating Washington's Consumer Protection Act.McKenna's office also reached out to foreign officials for assistance. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) filed its own civil lawsuit in the Federal Court of Australia alleging violations of the Trade Practices Act of 1974. The ACCC is Australia's federal consumer protection agency. The New South Wales Police Force is also investigating the matter. "We allege the defendants littered the Internet with ads for secret ‘cures' for everything from Lyme disease and tuberculosis to sexually transmitted diseases and cancer," said Senior Counsel Paula Selis, an assistant attorney general who heads up the High-Tech Unit. "They reeled in more $1 million from desperate consumers who paid for worthless information."The High-Tech Unit investigates cases involving violations of Washington laws pertaining to computer spyware, spam and online advertising. A computer forensics investigator, Rebecca Henderson, uses sophisticated tools to detect hackers, spyware purveyors and other Internet mischief-makers. In this case, a member of the public forwarded a questionable Web site to the AGO.Washington's complaint alleges that the defendants created numerous Web sites, many showcasing a fictitious testimonial from someone supposedly living in Seattle. Many of the sites used sexual innuendos to grab attention, with headlines such as: "Sex Crazed 60 Year Old Reveals a Simple Home Treatment that Eliminates Fibromyalgia in Days." Others took a more maternal approach: "39 Year Old Mom Stumbles Upon a Simple 5 Step Plan That Eliminates Multiple Sclerosis in Weeks."After a description of years of suffering from symptoms, the bogus testimonial writers shared how a secret cure was revealed to them. An example:
"A week later I arrived at Jan's house, bottle of wine in hand... Ready to do whatever it is girls do on a 'girls night'. I still wasn't sure... I walked in and was immediately introduced to Theresa - the woman that was about to change my life... Theresa was a 60 year old widower, but she looked, and behaved like a 30 year old swinger!! We hit it off... Especially when I found out that Theresa had also battled with Endometriosis." Henderson said the "cures" were actually e-Books containing a few facts about the relevant disease and instructions to consume either something called "Miracle Mineral Solution" or a concoction of apple cider vinegar and baking soda as part of an extreme diet. Selis said the state's investigation revealed that at least 200 Washington consumers paid between $16.97 to $24.47 to download one of the reports.The Washington AGO has

the authority to take action under civil law and request injunctive provisions to stop the deceptive business practices. But it can't file criminal charges. "That's why teaming up with Australian authorities was so valuable," McKenna said. The ACCC investigated the matter and on July 30, obtained voluntary injunctions pending the final trial in the Federal Court of Australia. Those injunctions require the defendants to take down the Web sites and prevent them from operating any similar sites."We followed the money trail to Australia," Henderson said, "then provided our investigative findings to the feds in Australia so they could step in."DOCUMENTS:Washington AGO ComplaintWeb Site Screenshot: Staph InfectionACCC Injunction OrderFederal Court of Australia