

Identifying and Combatting Fake News

The Truth

One of the first things we are taught as children is to ‘tell the truth.’ American folklore contains the story of first President George Washington as a child confessing to his parents that he did indeed cut down their cherry tree because “I cannot tell a lie.” In a court of law, we are made to take an oath that we will ‘tell the truth, the whole truth ...’

That is why the emergence of ‘fake news’ is so unsettling to businesses and individuals dependent on public trust to grow, prosper and ultimately do their jobs.

And that is why it is important for each of us to know more about this phenomenon known as ‘fake news’ — to learn what it is and how it works, and to be ready to deal with it if necessary.



Fake News Defined

‘Fake news:’ **fictitious or embellished stories that appear to be factual**, have been around for centuries — as long as there have been storytellers with an agenda and an audience available to attract. The term “fake news” began appearing in social media and later mainstream media in 2016. The term was first used to describe a large volume of supposed news stories about the United States presidential candidates and other globally recognized people that were shared on social media from a specific location in Eastern Europe. The ability to earn money by getting social media users to click on advertisements or boosted posts encouraged ‘viral entrepreneurs’ to invent headlines and stories that drew thousands, even millions of readers who then shared these ‘can-you-believe it’ links to their own and so on.

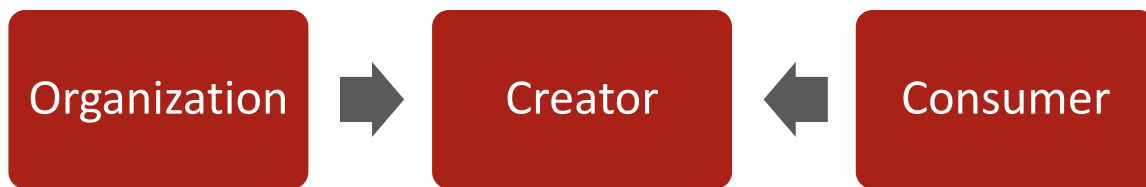
Shrinking the Target

If a person or company deliberately targets you or your business with a fake news story, there are two ways to react:

1. Allow it to spin itself out of the news cycle: ‘no traction, no action.’ Silence is also a message.
2. Have a clearly crafted message ready to go, aimed specifically at the audience you need most to reach: customers, potential customers, fellow businesses, or whoever is directly impacted by the negative false information being shared.

Links in the Chain

Creators of fake news do not work in isolation. Those who physically create the stories and social media posts are the ‘middle people’ — if you will, the connector between companies or organizations (or political offices) seeking a large volume of shares, boosted search ratings and paying customers, and readers wanting to be shocked, surprised, validated in their views, or the first to say ‘Did you hear what I heard?’



Each of these links in the chain of organization-creator-consumer is part of the problem of ‘fake news’ and part of the solution as well. If one link moves contrary to the flow, the fake news story is slowed. On the information highway, a slow-moving post soon becomes part of the past and melts from view.

Separating Fact from Fiction

So, how to spot fake news? There are a few signs to consider:

- Your instinct
- The source
- Backtrack the origin
- Search for similar stories
- Use the tools

Fake news is created deliberately to mislead, either to gain attention, earn money under false pretenses, or harm reputations. What other reasons could there be for circulation of inaccurate or invented facts?

- Satire
- Poor journalism
- Human error