

## Did not like: Fake Facebook postings result in \$200K verdict



Mathew Flatow

■ BY BILL CRESENZO  
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A Mecklenburg County jury has awarded \$200,000 to a man whose neighbor waged a campaign of harassment against him that included enlisting friends to leave poor reviews on his businesses' Facebook page and posting a personal ad offering massages that included his phone number.



Arcangela  
Mazzariello

Mathew Flatow of SeiferFlatow in Charlotte said that his client, Gerald Thibeau, and Thibeau's neighbor, Douglas Bryant, were social acquaintances until Bryant's behavior toward women on social media prompted Thibeau to take back an invitation he extended to Bryant to travel together to Las Vegas.

In his complaint, Thibeau said the falling out angered Bryant, who began a vicious campaign against Thibeau that included putting skunk spray in Thibeau's car, jamming Thibeau's front door knob with blank keys, and tampering with Thibeau's mailbox.

Bryant also posted an ad on Craigslist offering "man-to-man massages" with Thibeau's phone number and posted untrue comments about Thibeau on Facebook, calling him a rapist. Bryant and his friends, sometimes under pseudonyms, posted negative reviews and ratings on the Facebook page of Thibeau's business, Phone Ninjas, causing his rating to drop from 4.8 out of 5 stars, to 3.3. Because Phone Ninja relies on online advertising and industry reputation to attract customers, the damage drove away prospective customers, Thibeau alleged.

Flatow said he hired an expert who was able to trace many of the comments back to Bryant's computer, but Bryant denied the allegations, at one point saying that the concierge of his building had access to his apartment

and would at times use his computer. The trial lasted six days and the jury deliberated for 90 minutes before returning its verdict on March 16.

At one point during the feud, Thibeau had confronted Bryant. He thought Bryant was about to hit him, so he threw punches at his friend-turned-enemy. Bryant countersued Thibeau for battery, and the jury awarded him \$500.

Flatow said that Thibeau is now "doing great," and that he and Bryant are no longer neighbors.

"He feels like justice has been served," Flatow said. "Most small businesses owners don't go this far to defend their reputations."

Arcangela Mazzariello, also of SeiferFlatow in Charlotte, also represented Thibeau.

Eric Levine of Charlotte represented Bryant. He could not be reached for comment on the verdict.

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### VERDICT REPORT — DEFAMATION

**Amount:** \$200,000

**Injuries alleged:** Loss of earnings and emotional distress

**Case name:** Gerald Thibeau and Phone Ninjas v. Douglas Bryant

**Court:** Mecklenburg County Superior Court

**Case No.:** 18-CVS-7647

**Judge:** Jesse Caldwell III

**Date of verdict:** March 16

**Attorneys for plaintiff:** Mathew Flatow and Arcangela Mazzariello of SeiferFlatow in Charlotte

**Attorney for defendant:** Eric Levine of Charlotte