

FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Division of Consumer & Business Education

THIS JUST IN: Fake News Sites Promote Bogus Weight Loss Benefits of Acai Berry Supplements

When you want the straight scoop on what's going on in your community or around the world, you probably count on the news for accurate and truthful reporting. More and more, scam artists are exploiting your trust in well-known news organizations by setting up fake news sites to peddle their wares. The fake sites, which usually display logos of legitimate news organizations, promote everything from bogus weight loss products to work-at-home opportunities, anti-aging products and debt reduction plans.

Getting to the What, When, Where, Why and How

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the nation's consumer protection agency, cautions that many websites have sprouted up that claim to be objective news sources and describe a so-called "investigation" of the effectiveness of acai berry dietary supplements. Acai palm trees are native to Central and South America, and supplements made with acai berries have become popular in recent years.

A typical site displays the logo of a legitimate major television network, newspaper, or magazine, followed by a "reporter's" first-hand experience using the product. The reporter may claim a dramatic weight loss over several weeks, with no change in diet or exercise routine. Throughout the fake news site are links to other websites where consumers can buy the reviewed weight loss products or sign up for a "free" trial. Testimonials or comments from supposedly satisfied customers also may be posted on the site.

Through its investigations of "news" sources like these, the FTC found that nearly everything about these sites is fake. The websites – owned by marketers – are simply a tool to entice consumers to click on links to the sellers' sites, then buy acai berry supplements. The sellers pay the marketers a commission based on the number of consumers they lure to their sites. There is no reporter, no investigation, no dramatic weight loss, no satisfied consumer who left a comment, and no affiliation with a reputable news source. **As a rule, legitimate news organizations do not endorse products.** The photographs of the reporters are copied from legitimate news sources, and the images showing weight loss are stock photographs. The comments are cut and pasted from other, similarly fake sites. The weight loss claims – such as "lose 25 pounds in four weeks" – are not only false, but impossible to achieve in the time frame and manner described on the sites.

For More Information

If you are trying to lose weight, talk with your health care professional and read *Weighing the Evidence in Diet Ads*. This FTC publication gives information to help you avoid a weight loss rip-off.

The FTC works to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or get free information on consumer issues, visit **ftc.gov** or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261.

Watch a new video, *How to File a Complaint*, at **ftc.gov/video** to learn more. The FTC enters consumer complaints into the Consumer Sentinel Network, a secure online database and investigative tool used by hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

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April 2011