

The Scarlet Letter of the Digital Age: Why Hiring a Reputation Manager Is Now a "RICO" Overt Act

In a world where Google is your first impression, your resume, and your permanent record, the "Right to be Forgotten" does not exist. Instead, we have federal prosecutors like AUSA Patrick Murray turning standard business practices into **RICO Overt Acts**.

EXHIBIT A: FROM THE ACTUAL INDICTMENT

28. In or about January 2019, defendant JOSEPH LAFORTE caused Par Funding to hire a "reputation manager" to help conceal defendant JOSEPH LAFORTE's criminal history from investors and potential investors.

39. On or about September 20, 2019, defendant JOSEPH LAFORTE sent a text message to Par Funding's "reputation manager" instructing him to take actions to conceal negative information about defendant JOSEPH LAFORTE on the internet.

THESE ARE THE 7 COUNTS IN THE ACTUAL INDICTMENT THAT THEY EXPECT YOU TO FIGHT AT TRIAL- COMPLETE NONSENSE!!!

9	9/14/19	Text message from defendant JOSEPH LAFORTE to the reputation manager regarding "do[ing] something w[ith] [his] google related searches," as "[i]t has Gino and the Bloomberg article"
10	9/16/19	Email from defendant JOSEPH LAFORTE to the reputation manager selecting an article for the deceptive publicity campaign
11	9/20/19	Text message from defendant JOSEPH LAFORTE to the reputation manager complaining that his "google search has Bloomberg first and doj second" and instructing the reputation manager to "[g]et this shit fixed"

Count	Appx. Date	Description
12	9/21/19	Text message from the reputation manager to defendant JOSEPH LAFORTE regarding a deceptive publicity campaign
14	11/23/19	Text message from defendant JOSEPH LAFORTE to the reputation manager stating an article about his federal conviction was "hurting [his] business reputation" and asking what could be done

Today, we are looking at the case of **Joseph LaForte (Eastern District of Pennsylvania, Case No. 2:23-cr-00198)**. LaForte was recently sentenced to 15.5 years in prison but tucked inside his indictment are 7 charges that should terrify every business owner, influencer, and private citizen: **the criminalization of online reputation management**.

Hiring a Reputation Manager: A Federal Crime?

The government did not just mention reputation management once; they "stacked" it into a series of criminal acts. According to the **Second Superseding Indictment**, the feds allege that the very act of trying to look better on the internet is evidence of a criminal enterprise.

The Allegation (Count One - Overt Acts):

- "Defendants Joseph LaForte and others... hired a reputation management company to suppress negative information on the internet regarding LaForte's criminal history."
- The indictment further alleges that paying these firms was a "means and method" of a wire fraud conspiracy because its "deceived" investors into seeing current accolades rather than his past from nearly a decade prior.

Think about that: **If you hire a firm to push down a negative review or an old news story, the government can now argue you are "conspiring" to hide the truth from the public.** This is not just about Joe LaForte; it is a precedent that says your digital footprint is no longer yours to manage.

The Reputation Management Industry: Normal or Nefarious?

If hiring an SEO firm is a crime, then the "elite" of the world are running a global criminal enterprise. Reputation management is a **massive \$13.24 billion industry**. It is used by the most respected institutions on earth.

Who uses these firms?

- **The Fortune 500:** Companies like **Amazon, Wells Fargo, and Uber** have all reportedly engaged in "search suppression" or "sentiment repair" during crises.
- **The Elite:** High-net-worth individuals (HNWIs) hire firms like **Reputation Pros, Keever SEO, and Elite Reputation Management** for one simple reason: Google is a forum where people gather to judge you.
- **Market Data:** Over **91% of people** believe a company's reputation is linked to at least 25% of its market value. In the business world, if you are not managing your reputation, you are failing your shareholders.

Joseph LaForte was writing for numerous publications and building a massive company. Why shouldn't his current successes—the "new great things" he was doing—be front and center? The government wants you to wear a scarlet letter forever, but in business, accolades belong on the front page.

The "Stacking" Strategy: How AUSA Patrick Murray Won Before Trial

The legal math is simple: the more charges you throw, the higher the pressure to plea. This is known as **Charge Stacking**.

1. **The Initial Charge (May 2023):** The government starts with a baseline of charges.
2. **The "Superseding" Tactic (February 26, 2024):** Just as the defense prepares for trial, the AUSA drops a **Superseding Indictment**. This resets the clock, forces the defense to review millions of new documents, and drains the defendant's resources.
3. **The Trial Penalty:** In the federal system, **97% of cases end in a plea bargain**. Why? Because the more charges a defendant has to fight, the harder it is to convince a jury of "innocence" on every single point. It is a strategy designed to overwhelm and extract a plea.

A Question for the Readers

Joseph LaForte wanted the world to see the man he had become, not just a case from 8 years prior. Is that a crime, or is it just smart business?

How many of you have hired a reputation manager, untagged a photo, or optimized your LinkedIn to look better for a boss or a client? If it can happen to Joseph LaForte, it can happen to anyone. The feds have turned "looking your best" into a felony.