

Standing Up To Corporate Bullies and Asshole Billionaires

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In most people's opinion, Google is a big corporate bully run by "Asshole billionaires" with a penchant for demagoguery. Individuals and the voting public, as a whole, must stand up to big, unethical bullies like these!

Bullying is the use of force, threat, or [coercion](#) to [abuse](#), [intimidate](#), or aggressively [dominate](#) others. The behavior is often repeated and habitual. One essential prerequisite is the perception, by the bully or by others, of an imbalance of [social](#) or physical power, which distinguishes bullying from conflict.^[1] Behaviors used to assert such domination can include verbal [harassment](#) or [threat](#), physical [assault](#) or coercion, and such acts may be directed repeatedly towards particular targets, like bribing politicians to attack competitors and rigging the largest search engine on Earth to destroy voters lives.

Posted by Cecil Rosner

Standing up to corporate bullies

Cecil Rosner

One of the most potent threats to investigative journalism comes from the legal departments of big corporations, writes Cecil Rosner. Here's a great example and the lessons for journalists.

The BBC wasn't mincing its words last May when it reported on a shocking incident involving a multinational corporation and one of the poorest countries on earth.

"It is the biggest toxic dumping scandal of the 21st century," the public broadcaster said, "the type of environmental vandalism that international treaties are supposed to prevent. Now [Newsnight](#) can reveal the truth about the waste that was illegally tipped on Ivory Coast's biggest city, Abidjan."

The story involved the giant oil and mineral-trading firm [Trafigura](#), which was attempting to treat and dispose of hundreds of tons of toxic sulphur sludge. In the dead of night on August 18, 2006, the waste was off-loaded in Abidjan and dumped all over the city. Residents picked through debris, looking for anything of value. Thousands later got sick.

Reporters Notebook

The BBC interviewed Fidel Kouadio, eight months pregnant when the fumes invaded her home. She gave birth prematurely and her baby died within a day. According to some reports, nearly 100,000 people eventually sought hospital treatment, and more than 30,000 launched a lawsuit against the company, citing breathing problems, diarrhea and other health issues. Ever since the episode had begun in 2006, Trafigura tried to deflect responsibility for the dumping and argued that the materials weren't particularly dangerous anyway, only that they smelled bad. The company also launched a comprehensive public relations campaign to counteract negative publicity. And they aggressively threatened to sue media outlets who waded into the story.

According to the Guardian newspaper, whenever journalists tried to write critically about the company, they were pressured by Carter-Ruck, London's most aggressive libel lawyers. The BBC was slapped with a libel writ for its reporting, and other journalists in the Netherlands and Norway were put on notice as well.

Last month, the story took another twist when the Guardian and BBC revealed internal company emails showing that Trafigura knew the waste dumped in Abidjan was so toxic it was banned across Europe. The emails revealed an effort to profit from suspect methods of treating the waste. As the story was breaking, Trafigura countered with compensation offers to the thousands of people who had initiated the lawsuit against it.

The damning internal emails had been gathered by a group of agencies including Greenpeace and Amnesty and shared with reporters at different media outlets. The [Guardian](#) said the effort was a good example of international co-operation among media outlets. Spokesmen for Greenpeace said they noticed many media outlets shying away from the story in the early going because of fears they would be sued. But the eventual release of the emails gave the story a different complexion.

Even the UN human rights special rapporteur, [Okechukwu Ibeanu](#), criticized the company for potentially stifling independent reporting and public criticism in a report Trafigura ironically tried to prevent being published as well. Trafigura maintains the settlement of the court case [vindicates its position](#), and it continues to deny direct responsibility for the dumping, which was done by a sub-contractor.

What are the lessons for investigative journalists from this episode? For one thing, it demonstrates that even in an age of international awareness of human rights and environmental concerns, there can be disturbing cases of illegal activities that affect so many thousands of people. What is equally disturbing is how little coverage the case has received in North America.

Secondly, the case is another reminder of the courage that journalists need to show in the face of intense pressures. Threats of lawsuits and gag orders can weigh heavily on individual journalists and their organizations. The BBC responded with a fighting defence, arguing that Trafigura's denials lacked candour and credibility, and accusing the company of a cover-up. Even though Trafigura has agreed to pay about \$50 million to settle compensation claims, and an additional \$160 million to the Ivory Coast government for the cleanup, the case is not over. Greenpeace now wants to prosecute Trafigura in the British courts for manslaughter and causing grievous bodily harm.

(Image by [alex.s](#). Used under Creative Commons license.)

Cecil Rosner is managing editor for CBC Manitoba and editor of J-Source's Investigative Journalism area. He teaches investigative journalism at the University of Winnipeg, and is the author of [Behind the Headlines: A History of Investigative Journalism in Canada](#).

Standing Up to Corporate Bullies: When the Courtroom Becomes the Playground

- by: [Teresa Kirchner](#)

I have come to realize that my professional life basically boils down to standing up to bullies. The only difference is that the playground is now a courtroom instead of an asphalt lot behind my elementary school. Our practice primarily consists of representing franchisees who have been ripped off by con men and thieves disguised as franchisors who, many times, are no different from the bullies we all encountered as kids. Instead of using physical strength that childhood bullies use, these grown-up bullies use their money to try to control their prey. The vast resources these bullies have can be a very effective deterrent to those who may seek to challenge questionable business practices. However, when those victimized by such bullies stand up to these con men and thieves, the victims usually win. I use the bully analogy as a way of introduction to one of our recent cases. Beautiful Brands International, LLC, ("BBI") is a company based in Oklahoma. They tout themselves as "premier franchise development and restaurant innovation company." However, if recent articles in the *Tulsa World* and *Franchise Times* are to be believed, the "innovation" is failing and there are many unhappy franchisees and brand partners. I am not here to talk about the problems in the BBI system, though. This article is about the blatant bully tactics this company is taking to silence its critics.

After the article critical of BBI was published by the *Tulsa World*, several comments were made online about the company. A few of those comments were made by a user known as Unhappy Franchisee and Unhappyfranchisee.com. Keep in mind that there were several other comments by other posters on the site. However, BBI singled out Unhappy Franchisee and filed suit against "John Doe." BBI used that filing to issue subpoenas to the *Tulsa World* and Google to obtain identifying information about Unhappy Franchisee. I was contacted by "Mr. Doe" and agreed to take the case. At first, Mr. Doe and I discussed filing motions attacking the subpoenas by asserting his First Amendment right to free speech. However, after further discussions, it occurred to us that BBI was simply using the subpoenas to bully my client and as a deterrent to others standing up to their suspicious business practices. We know that BBI already knows the identity of "John Doe" as several threatening, crude and outrageous tweets have been directed to him by this "premier" franchise development company. Reading those tweets brought me full circle back to the days on the playground. It was time to stand up to the bully.

"Mr. Doe" authorized me to disclose his identity to the attorney for BBI which I did today. Mr. Doe is a man by the name of Sean Kelly. Mr. Kelly operates a website known as www.unhappyfranchisee.com. That site is an invaluable resource for those considering the purchase of a franchise and for those having issues with their franchisor. There is power in numbers and the site gives a voice to those who have been bullied and beat down by fraudulent and failing franchise systems. Needless to say, Sean Kelly is not very popular with the bullies. Sean should be commended because by agreeing to the disclosure of his identity, he has now opened himself up to a lawsuit alleging that he defamed this "innovative" company. However, Sean Kelly not only talks the talk, he walks the walk. Sean is in the business of helping franchisees like I am. He has been in that line of work much longer than me. I can tell you that we do not do this to get rich. We do it because it's the right thing to do. It will now be interesting to see what the bully does.

I have a 9-year-old son (actually, he'll be 10 at the end of this month). I have always told my son, much to the dismay of his mother, that if you stand up to a bully, 99% of the time they will back down. The other 1% of the time, the bully keeps coming because they lack the intellectual capacity to see that they have lost their power. I see the exact same scenario play out in the courtroom. When those victimized by these overgrown bullies stand up to them in our playground known as the courtroom, they see that they are now on a much more level playing field. Unlike the playgrounds of our youth, the justice system operates under a set of rules that all parties must respect. Justice requires that these rules be applied in a non-discriminatory fashion without regard to the financial strength of the parties. Many times franchisors try to use the court system to further bully their victims. However, if the victims stand up for their rights, our justice system will neutralize that improper and perverted use of the system.

I am proud to represent individuals who, at one time, felt like they lacked the power to stand up to bullies. To see their joy and happiness when they are vindicated in the justice system is worth more than any amount of money I could ever be paid. I am also proud to represent Sean Kelly, a friend and a man who has inspired and given me the strength to continue these fights throughout the past several years. This is not an easy profession, but Sean Kelly, through his actions, shows me that I am not alone. If you have been victimized by a company who has taken money from you by fraud, don't be afraid to stand up for yourself. We are here to guide you through the legal system and take the fear of the unknown out of the equation. We are here to use the power of the judicial system to advocate for you. Call us for a free and completely confidential consultation.

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[Google's Corporate bullies - YouTube](#)

Bullying and Corporate Psychopaths at Work: Clive Boddy at TEDxHanzeUniversity - Duration: 14:33. by TEDx Talks 106,171 views. 14:33 How to Handle a ...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w7sg4Pz_kg
