

## Google...Can we trust Google? Especially when they allowed the defamation of hundreds of thousands under the Freedom of Speech Act

### **Defamation control**

Before the digital age dictated our every movement, it took a lot more time and effort to find information about a specific person. You may have needed to hire an investigator or spend hours digging through dusty old court documents or financial statements.

Since the explosion of the World Wide Web, access to both public and private information has changed drastically. If you're reading this, it is likely that your name, picture, employment status and even your home address is documented and relatively easy to obtain online.

It wouldn't be too difficult to find your friends either, not to mention the people who are not your friends or people with whom you may have been in conflict.

It is this balance between privacy and freedom of information that has been at the centre of debate in both news and court rooms recently. A recent EU court ruling has just pushed digital giants, Google, to create a 'request to be forgotten' feature so that people have the chance to get certain websites removed from its search results.

So is the availability of information empowering us or doing more damage than good?

It depends on your lifestyle, career, social status and desired public image. We have all done things we regret, said inappropriate things or acted carelessly, whether that is at home or in our place of work. The problem is, with such a wealth of online platforms available to publish someone's actions or mistakes, our privacy has been severely jeopardised.

In a matter of minutes, it's possible to write a scathing restaurant review, publish somebody's private photographs or even damage the career of a well-respected professional. Some people would argue that defamation has been hiding behind a veil of freedom of speech.

The laws which were put in place to ensure that everyone had a fair say are now being abused to damage reputations.

Without any verification of truth, a defamatory statement can be viewed by millions through Google's search engine. An individual's worst moment, whether they have already paid the price for their mistake or not, can be the first thing Google users learn about them. Depending on the severity of the information, this malicious content has the potential to destroy lives.

The new legislation puts greater pressure on search engines to consider what is in the public interest, and what is simply malicious or unjust. Google's 'Search removal request' form, which can be viewed [here](#), states that the company will also consider how outdated the search results are.

Although the request to be forgotten ruling doesn't mean that defamatory information will be removed from the internet – search engines only have the power to take them off their results page – it is still a step in the right direction. The decision, which could help make the internet a much more ethical place, is a landmark ruling for the case of privacy.