

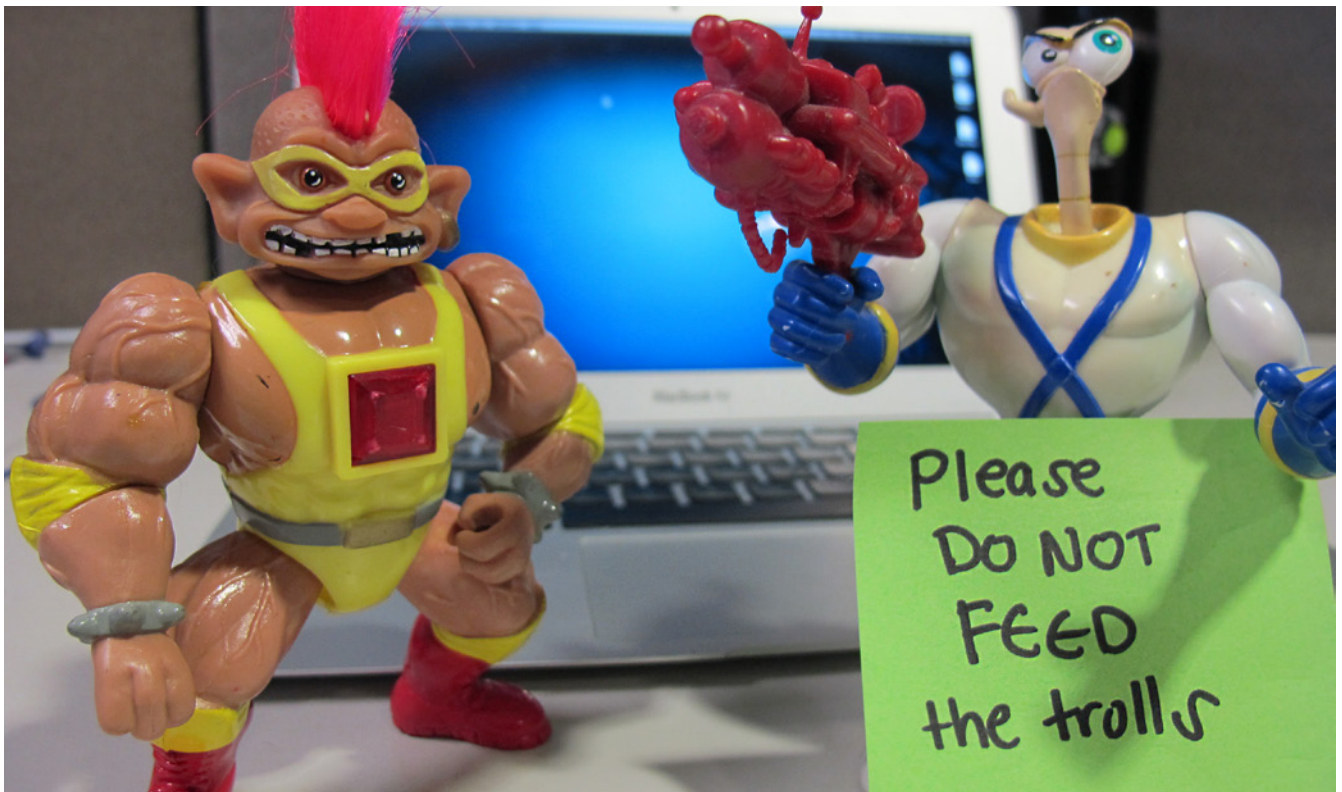
January - February 2022

# THE EXPORTER

the business of International Trade



● CUSTOMS ● FINANCE ● KEY EXPORT OPPORTUNITIES ● NEWS ● COMPLIANCE ●



# Beat The Trolls!

Amanda Hamilton explains what can you do if a customer becomes a troll

People can be very different creatures when they are online. It's called Online Disinhibition Effect, and it can see people being unusually open about their lives and/or feelings or it can see them engage in extraordinary kindness. However, the Online Disinhibition Effect can manifest in less benign ways – it can bring out the worst in people. And that can be bad for business.

A friend of mine runs a business selling online courses. A learner enrolled and paid for the course and then two months later, changed her mind and wanted a refund. The terms and conditions of the business clearly state that there is a time stipulation on getting a refund and she was out of time. She then promptly left an aggressive message on social media making allegations that the content was outdated and not to go near this training company. My friend contacted her immediately to discuss this with her, and she eventually retracted her statement and accepted her fate.

If you find yourself in a similar situation, the most important thing to do is to take the sting out of the bad comments by responding in a very positive way, for example: 'We are sorry you feel this way about your experience. Perhaps we can contact you and get your personal feedback to help us improve our service in the future.' Making the reviewer feel important and one of your valued customers is the best way to tackle such a situation.

It may not always be possible to defuse a situation, but generally, the worst thing you can do, is to ignore it. On occasion, however, depending on the nature of the review, it may be self-evident that the review should not warrant a reply. This is a choice that the business has to make. If the post is made on Facebook, then possibly, a complaint can be made (if the comments are questionable). Some review sites do contact the trader/service provider to ascertain whether this is a genuine customer and grievance.

If you attempt to diffuse the situation without success, and grievance morphs into trolling, you may have to turn to legal methods. A 'Cease and Desist' letter could be sent (if you know the troller's postal or email address). This informs the person to cease what they are doing under threat of legal action. If that fails to work, a claim for compensation based on harassment could be made through the courts.

The legal term 'defamation' describes someone making a false verbal (slander) or written (libel) statement about an individual or business which damages their reputation, resulting in financial loss. However, in the UK (remember there can be differences in Scotland), the burden lies with the person making such an allegation of loss that financial loss has been suffered as a direct result of such defamation. If that can be proved, then it may be worth taking legal action. But beware! It is

a costly process. All of the above actions, of course, may be negated by the fact that the reviewer or 'troller' may be anonymous, but if you are aware of who they are, then mediation could be considered in order to settle any issues without recourse to litigation through the courts.

If someone is bad-mouthing your company or your professionalism, it may affect your business or career quite severely, and if you need legal advice or assistance, you can always approach a paralegal who will offer you access to justice at a more reasonable cost than a solicitor. To find a qualified paralegal visit the National Paralegal Register: [www.nationalparalegals.co.uk/national-paralegal-register/](http://www.nationalparalegals.co.uk/national-paralegal-register/) ●

**Amanda Hamilton is Chief Executive of the National Association of Licenced Paralegals (NALP), a non-profit membership body and the only paralegal body that is recognised as an awarding organisation by Ofqual (the regulator of qualifications in England). Through its Centres around the country, accredited and recognised professional paralegal qualifications are offered for those looking for a career as a paralegal professional.**  
[www.nationalparalegals.co.uk](http://www.nationalparalegals.co.uk)