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BBB of LA, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino Counties Needs Help

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And we aren't talking about hiring more attorneys!
by Bernadette Karr

The Better Business Bureau, an organization that sets standards for fair business practices, needs help in Southern California to learn how to set standards for fair business practices. If that sounds like a line Jay Leno might read off a Tonight Show cue card, maybe Jay should. He'd certainly receive a few laughs. At least that's what your average person is doing when they see the LABBB's inconsistent rating system and scores for Southern Cal's businesses.



BBB Sign

Actually, maybe the average person would get scared when they see the way the LABBB is rating its businesses. Would you shop for groceries at Vons if you saw an F rating? Or buy a Christian Dior designer item if they have a C rating? Would it make you think twice about doing business in Southern California? Or, are you smart enough to recognize the ratings as nonsense and conduct business as usual?

There was a time when we could place trust in the BBB, but I think they've become totally out of control and need some real professional help. At least a bit of consultation from someone who knows how to set up a fair and equitable rating system with validity and reliability – something taught in Psych 101.

The Better Business Bureau of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties of Southern California is in an operation mess. There were so many complaints about the rating system used by the LABBB, the office removed their open comment Blog where business owners could write comments and feedback about the LABBB's rating. At the end of this article we capture a few of the frustrated feedbacks from their blog.

Did you know each BBB office is run differently? So, even though they appear to be run similarly, they are free to do whatever they want. There's a National BBB Office (BBB.org), and there are individual offices to handle USA counties by zip code. If your business is located in Chicago, you belong to that BBB office, if in Houston the BBB office is another, and so on. That makes sense.

The thing that's totally out of whack is the lack of consistency used to run the different BBB offices. Genuis Hugh Hefner ran his Bunny Clubs with consistency! Actually, Hef's genius systems made it easy for any Bunny to work in any of the Clubs at any moment in time – and they did! So, why doesn't the BBB run their business with consistency? It certainly would make for fair business practices and help create trust – the backbone of the BBB.

The National BBB's website states the Better Business Bureau - Start with Trust. How can there be trust when there's a lack of fairness, validity, reliability and consistency in the BBB business practices?

After visiting several different BBB offices' websites, it was easy to see there's absolutely little to no consistency in which a business is treated throughout the BBB system. So, where's the standard for fair business practice? Certainly not in the way they treat the businesses. Although after reviewing BBB websites in each of the major USA sectors – even the other three offices testing the use of the A – F rating system, it's easy to see the LABBB stands out like a sore thumb.

Most of the BBB offices summarize a business's information and complaints. For the most part, it's harmless information and illustrates irate customer feedback -- a place to do research for the curious average consumer. Searching large businesses produces thousands of complaints, but leaves the company in good standing, and we all would probably still shop at these places.

However, in the Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties of Southern California, the tables turn. The LABBB office is run by two attorneys. We called to talk with the LABBB for research about this article.

It's impossible to get through to William G. Mitchell (Attorney), President. When calling about the rating system, callers are put through to Gary Almond (Attorney). We spoke with Gary Almond, and he was less than accommodating. Unless a caller has only good things to say about the rating system, the LABBB makes it perfectly clear they do not want to hear from you.

We contacted some of the businesses within the LABBB jurisdiction for comments and feedback about the rating system. The businesses requested we keep their names anonymous based on retaliation from the LABBB. One of the people we spoke with said their score was dropped from an A quickly to a C and then to a D when they expressed their displeasure with the one-sided, unfairly applied system.

If you haven't seen the rating system the LABBB uses to classify businesses within their jurisdiction take a look. A very small sample is listed below. Their website is located at labbb.org. You'll need the names of businesses in Southern California. You can obtain business names through a Google search for Southern California Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber of Commerce has comprehensive lists of Southern California businesses by name and location.

Here's a very small sample of the confusion the LABBB creates using the rating system haphazardly:

'F' RATING FOR 1 BBB COMPLAINT.

Vons Grocery Store located at 8201 Topanga Canyon Blvd Canoga Park, CA 91304 has a F rating with 2 complaints.

'CC' RATING FOR 1 BBB COMPLAINT.

Christian Dior high-end fashion design house located at 48650 Seminole Dr Ste 220 Cabazon, CA 92230 has a CC rating with 1 complaint.

'A' RATING FOR 70 BBB COMPLAINTS.

LegalZoom.Com.Inc. an attorney-based resource located at 7083 Hollywood Blvd Suite 180 Los Angeles, CA 90028-8902 has a A rating with 70 complaints.

Here are some other comments found when researching this article:

1. On Digg.com Toshiba Gets An F From Better Business Bureau - Unless I'm reading it wrong, that is only the Los Angeles area BBB. I wonder how these numbers match up to national numbers. Toshiba has always had a good reputation within my circle of tech friends, and I find it hard to believe they got an F overall.

2. We have been with the VNC, Hotel Motel assoc and a Chamber Member for many years and have been in Orange County working in a family owned business over 60 years. We take over 70,000 Trips a month I have had 3 complaints in 36 months I am now at a c grade I think your rating system is isn't fair. Jerry Slagle, Yellow Cab G.O.C.

3. While I appreciate the effort and agree that the rating system is good, I agree with what some others have said, that there needs to be some sort of guidelines about what needs to be done to improve a company's rating. Our company has a B, which I consider to be very low. We've responded to every concern and have only denied compensation/action when the request was unfounded or when the customer was requesting something unreasonable. How long does a company get penalized for past decisions and exactly what measurements are used to determine a company's rating?

4. THE BBB TAKES A ONE SIDED APPROACH TO A CLIENTS COMPLAINT. VALID OR NOT, THE COMPLAINT GOES TOWARDS A COMPANIES RATING WITH THE BBB. GOOD BUSINESS'S ARE GUILTY UNTILL PROVEN INNOCENT. THIS IS NOT AMERICAN AND SHOULD NOT BE TOLERATED BY THE BUSINESS WORLD. FAIR TRADE IS VALUED BY ALL CONCERNED BUSINESS AND CONSUMERS A LIKE. DO YOUR CLIENTS A FAIR SERVICE, NOTHING MORE, NOTHING LESS

5. I want to express how upset I am with the BBB. I have been in business for 17 years and last week received the first ever complaint via the BBB. We have an excellent reputation in the industry and have never given the BBB a second thought. I now find out that we have had a D or unsatisfactory rating since our inception. It is inconceivable to me that the BBB would give us a negative rating based upon lack of information . I find this unfair at best and unethical at worst. If an organization is going to publish a rating on a company that organization should assume the responsibility publishing the truth, not an assumed version of the truth. I will waste valuable time and money trying to improve a rating that in my mind is rendered meaningless due to the process that determines these ratings. Unbelievable

6. I don't think your rating system is fair. We've been in business since 1984 and have been given a ccc rating because it appears. 1 time we didn't give a refund. Believe or not the customer isn't always right and sometimes a refund is not in order. Normally we give the refund just to get the problem off our books but when a complaint is without merit we won't just 'buy' off the customer and the complaint.

2. we have 1 no response. to my knowledge, I don't have any response not answered. In one instance the same complain taint simply reiterated is complaint after our response. We never recd that complaint because it was obvious that he wasn't asking for something, just restating his original complaint.

7. Over 20,000 order in almost 4 years of business on-line 4 complaints.

(1) you list as non-responded, but when I told you that it was worked out with the customer, you didn't verify.

(1) where we followed our published policies to the letter

(1) where I pointed out that the complaint was a consumer attempting to defraud me (they had ordered (2) of the same items days apart, both were sent, both were received. Then they called and said one was broken. We replaced it at our cost. Then they called and said that they wanted to return one (after they received the new replacement) We offered to take it back per our returns policy, they then stated that they wanted us to pay shipping and give full credit (waive our restock). We refused.)

(1) where the customer claims to have cancelled a backorder, we have no record of the cancel, but have agreed to take the item back and waive the restock. And for this I get rated with an.... F. I would say that this scoring and the BBB system has a great deal to be desired. I wonder, if I pay you guys do I get an honest rating? Is this really just a way to get me to cough up some \$s? I would ask by phone, but the problem is that no one alive ever bothers to answer the line in your office. so when I call I get to pay for 15 minutes of long distance while I sit on hold. Maybe I can complain to the BBB about the lousy service you provide.

8. See the disclaimer a company makes on their website located at GetaMentor.com.

Expect a response.

Send your comments in confidence to Bernadette Karr, [karrbernadette at hotmail dot com](mailto:karrbernadette@hotmail.com).