

Review: Complaint from a moving company about CBC reports on practices by the Better Business Bureau to rate moving companies

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REVIEW

CBC Television's The National and CBC Vancouver broadcast reports November 23, 2010, on practices by the Better Business Bureau (BBB) to rate moving companies. The reports asserted that Bureau members are more favourably rated.

The reports aired [locally by Kathy Tomlinson and Lisa Johnson](#) and [nationally by Tomlinson](#) for her regular Go Public segment. Part of the reports concerned an unaddressed complaint by a resident who had a negative experience with a BBB-member moving company that maintained a high rating.

The reports asserted that member companies with several complaints against them remain ranked high while non-members with only one complaint can be ranked low. It argued there was a link between membership and ranking.

CBC interviewed a representative of the Better Business Bureau who asserted that members and non-members were treated equally. She said members were downgraded when there were complaints. When Tomlinson identified a case in which that was not so, the representative acknowledged that.

Tomlinson reported that the Council of Better Business Bureaus was working on changes North American-wide to [the rating system](#), an indication that there were issues involving preferential treatment of members.

The Go Public segment features [considerable material online](#), including a lengthy story and other video.

The complainant, David Carlos of Straight Line Pro Moving Services, was never identified in the televised report. But his company moved the resident in the story and was the subject of the unresolved complaint to the BBB. He appears in the online text story.

Carlos said the customer was “irate and unreasonable” and that the complaint was exaggerated. His company maintained an A rating despite unresolved complaints.

A series of email exchanges between Carlos and Tomlinson preceded and followed the report. In them Carlos wrote that, among other things: the customer had refused to pay for services and turned to the BBB, which would not take his side; CBC had been used to assassinate his character; some might have inferred he was the driver involved in the dispute; the report failed to mention he had been a BBB award nominee; and he might litigate to resolve the matter.

Tomlinson wrote that the story was not at all about him but about the BBB’s rating practices. CBC also wrote Carlos to confirm he was satisfied with her responses.

Carlos repeatedly wrote CBC that he wanted a “conciliatory, reasonable approach to the issue, complaint and dispute.” If he received a satisfactory response, no legal action would be pursued. (The CBC Ombudsman steps aside when there is legal action under way or the threat of it.)

[CBC’s Journalistic Standards and Practices](#) call for accuracy, fairness and integrity in reporting.

“In our information gathering and reporting, we treat individuals and organizations with openness and respect,” the policy states. *“We are mindful of their rights. We treat them even-handedly.”*

CONCLUSION

The television and online reports did not violate CBC Journalistic Standards and Practices. Their presentation accurately and fairly raised awareness of a significant consumer issue.

The focus on the television and online stories was not on personal conduct but on the rating consequences of unresolved disputes involving members and non-members of the Better Business Bureau. The complainant was a minor element in the online and television stories. Naturally, though, the policy applies to any element.

I concluded that non-inclusion of the complainant in the television report did not constitute a violation of policy. I did not find an inaccuracy in the report, nor did I consider the non-inclusion journalistically deficient and thus non-compliant with policy. The focus of the story was on the rating system; the example of the unresolved dispute between the mover and the client simply enabled the larger story to be presented.

I concluded the complainant was given a reasonable opportunity to present his side of the dispute in the lengthier online story that dwelled on the details of the issue,

including more attention on the specific dispute example. He was identified as the owner, but not ever the driver, of the moving vehicle — and thus never the person who might have argued with the client at the site of the move. With that information, it was left to the audience to decide to believe either the mover or the client.

Kirk LaPointe
CBC Ombudsman