

Beat: News

Two New Yorkers plead guilty in scheme to bribe Amazon employees

Information and platform manipulation

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USPA NEWS - Conspiracy, fraud, and tax crimes connected to consultant's efforts to obtain advantages for some sellers on Amazon Marketplace

Two significant players in a scheme to bribe Amazon employees and contractors pleaded guilty today in U.S. District Court in Seattle to various federal charges, announced U.S. Attorney Nick Brown. Joseph Nilsen, 32, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud, conspiracy to commit violations of the Travel Act and filing a false tax return. Kristen Leccese, 33, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit violations of the Travel Act. Both are New York residents. Sentencings are scheduled for September 9, 2022, before the Honorable Richard A. Jones.

In all, three of six defendants have now pleaded guilty in a multimillion-dollar scheme to manipulate the Amazon Marketplace.

According to the plea agreements filed in the case, Nilsen, Leccese and their associates conspired to pay bribes to get Amazon employees and contractors to misuse their access to Amazon networks and confidential information. They sought to obtain various unfair competitive advantages for certain merchants on the Amazon Marketplace by, among other things, interfering with Amazon's ability to monitor the safety and authenticity of goods sold and impairing the accuracy of information posted on the Marketplace. In the two plea agreements, Nilsen and Leccese admit they conspired to pay bribes: to obtain confidential Amazon business information; to get suspended third-party sellers and product listings reinstated on the Marketplace; to circumvent Amazon restrictions and limitations on certain products; to gain access to restricted product categories by misrepresenting the source of goods; to manipulate customer reviews; and to surveil and attack other merchants and product listings.

Nilsen also pleaded guilty to filing a false tax return. In 2018 and 2019 he failed to file tax returns on behalf of his Amazon consulting company, and in 2017 he filed a false tax return significantly underreporting his and his company's actual taxable revenue. For tax year 2017, he admits the tax loss to the U.S. is \$44,178.

Conspiracy to commit violations of the Travel Act is punishable by up to five years in prison. Conspiracy to commit Wire Fraud is punishable by up to 20 years in prison. Filing a false tax return is punishable by up to three years in prison.

On February 11, 2022, defendant Rohit Kadimisetty was sentenced to ten months in prison and ordered to pay a \$50,000 fine.

Two defendants, Ephraim Rosenberg, of Brooklyn, New York, and Hadis Nuhanovic, of Acworth, Georgia, remain scheduled for trial in October 2022. Defendant Nishad Kunju, of Hyderabad, India, has not been arraigned on the indictment.

The case is being investigated by the FBI, with assistance from the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigations (IRS-CI), and the Department of Justice Office of International Affairs.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Steven Masada and Nicholas Manheim.

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Wendy writes for the United States Press Agency and is a former columnist with the Fulton County Expositor, Wauseon, Ohio.

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