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## Online posts bite dog kennel kennel bites back; Comments defamatory, judge rules

BY CHERYL CORNACCHIA, THE GAZETTE JULY 28, 2009

Beware of what you say online. It could come back to bite you.

An Ontario dog owner has been found guilty of slandering a commercial dog breeder based in Shawville with online comments about the poor health of a black Labrador retriever she bought from the family-run business three years earlier.

Lorie Gordon of Brockville, Ont., has been ordered to pay \$10,000 in damages to James, Charlene and Nicole Labombard, the owners of the Paws R Us Kennel, as well as \$4,000 in court costs.

The decision was rendered July 22 in Ottawa by Deputy Judge Michael Galligan of the Ontario Superior Court, Small Claims division.

Gordon said yesterday she will appeal the decision with the help of donations from animal rights advocates.

"Would I do it differently? No," she said. "I wrote they had sick dogs, which is true."

Galligan ruled the comments Gordon posted between July 2004 and April 2005 at [www.pets.ca](http://www.pets.ca) and another website popular with pet owners were defamatory.

The Ontario court decision is among only a handful to wade into the largely unregulated waters of the Internet.

In Quebec, a Superior Court judge ruled this month that Rawdon town officials acted appropriately when they shut down a website to stop anonymous users from posting derogatory comments about the mayor and police chief.

In the Ontario case, Galligan wrote that Gordon's comments were all the more damaging because "the Internet is instantaneous, seamless, interactive, blunt, borderless and far-reaching."

Luc Barrick, the Ottawa lawyer representing the Labombards, said the family was happy with the decision.

Testimony put forward by Gordon and several other witnesses, including representatives from Montreal's SPCA, attempted to portray Paws R Us as a puppy mill, he said.

"They are trying to say a commercial breeder is a puppy mill and they are not," Barrick said. "There are puppy mills out there, but my client is not one of them."

Marko Kulik, one of the owners of Montreal-based pets.ca, said he was shocked by the decision.

"I feel bad for her," Kulik said. "I don't know if she was right or wrong, but all she wanted to do was to prevent others from having the same experience."

Gordon's posts about the two dogs she got from Paws R Us - a black Labrador retriever that had to be put down because of severe hip dysplasia and a dog that was diagnosed with epilepsy - generated hundreds of comments on pets.ca before they were removed, he said.

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