


LifeLock Sued for Corporate Identity Theft

- By [Kim Zetter](#) 
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LifeLock is in the news again.

The identity theft protection firm whose CEO lists his Social Security number in ads for the company is being sued by Namesafe, a competitor in the identity theft protection market, for allegedly stealing the company's corporate identity and deceptive trade practices.

According to papers filed in Tennessee, Namesafe claims that LifeLock stole its trademark and deceptively diverted traffic meant for [Namesafe's](#) web site to [LifeLock's own web site](#).



The suit claims that LifeLock purchased sponsored ads on major search engines and portals such as Google, Yahoo, MSN and Hotbot that tricked users into landing on its site. Namesafe says the ads have disappeared since they were discovered, but it provided screen shots of the search results pages in its complaint. The company doesn't know for sure if the ads disappeared after it filed its suit but believes that is what occurred.

The company says that when users did a search on the word "Namesafe," sponsored ads appeared at the top of search result pages, which included a link for "Namesafe" and "Namesafe.com." But when users clicked the link, it took them to LifeLock's web site instead. The name LifeLock appeared in the ads next to or beneath "Namesafe" and "Namesafe.com," but Namesafe says the ads were clearly designed to fool Namesafe customers.

"It's like me taking out a newspaper ad for LifeLock.com and putting my phone number in it," said Namesafe founder and CEO David Ridings. "It's the same thing but on the internet scale. The purchasing of an ad that says Namesafe.com is deceptive and confuses consumers."



Namesafe launched its web site on February 25th and said it discovered the problem about a month ago in Google search results. Ridings says his company filed an informal online complaint with Google asking it to investigate. Google responded by saying it would not get into issues over the legalities of who can purchase brand name ads. Ridings says Google did not, in its response, confirm that LifeLock had purchased such ads.

Namesafe spokesman Dick Marsh said the company decided to file the lawsuit after he discovered

recently that the problem was occurring on other search sites as well. Marsh sent a press release to reporters after the company filed the suit.

I asked Ridings if his company sent a cease-and-desist letter to LifeLock before filing the suit or sent the company any inquiry asking it to explain the ads. He said Namesafe did not and defended the company's decision to file suit instead.

"This was not an honest mistake," he said. "We made a decision to do what we needed to do to get them to come down. We have a lot of television and radio ads and with every passing moment there's more potential for a consumer to be confused."

LifeLock released a statement denying that it purchased ads using Namesafe's brand name:

"Following notice of a pending lawsuit from WSMV in Nashville, TN on Thursday, we immediately began an investigation and determined that LifeLock Corporation has never purchased any competitive branded search terms. To be clear, LifeLock Corporation has never used the 'NameSafe' name in LifeLock ad copy," the statement reads.

Google has not yet responded to requests asking about the ads. I'll update this post if I hear back from the company.

This is not the first lawsuit against LifeLock. The company has been the target of class-action lawsuits from customers questioning its protection claims as well as a suit from credit reporting agency Experian for acting on consumers' behalf to place alerts on their credit accounts.

The company was also the target of much controversy last year after a reporter uncovered information about the [background of one of LifeLock's founders](#), who has since resigned.