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New York State Attorney General

Attorney General James Secures \$9.4 Million from Google and iHeartMedia over Misleading Radio Ads about a Google Device

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Google Paid Radio Personalities to Record and Air Endorsement Ads for Google Pixel 4 despite Never Using the Phone

NEW YORK – New York Attorney General Letitia James announced today that her office, along with a coalition of five other states and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), [secured \\$9.4 million from Google and iHeartMedia for airing misleading ads about a Google device](#). Google paid radio personalities to record endorsement ads describing their positive experience using the Google Pixel 4 phone, however, they had never used the phone prior to recording or running the ads. The misleading ads ran in English and Spanish more than 23,000 times in 10 different markets, including in New York, a violation of New York’s consumer protection laws. Google and iHeartMedia will pay more than \$9.4 million in civil penalties, costs, and fees of which New York will receive \$1.58 million.

“Google and iHeartMedia knowingly misled the public through inaccurate ads to turn a profit,” said **Attorney General James**. “False advertising is a fraud against the public. Companies big and small have a responsibility to be honest about their products and follow the law, there are no exceptions. Consumers deserve to know the truth about products before making any purchases. My office will not tolerate misleading claims, and outright lies from advertisers, and we will hold them accountable.”

“Google and iHeartMedia paid influencers to promote products they never used, showing a blatant disrespect for truth-in-advertising rules,” said **Federal Trade Commission's Bureau of Consumer Protection Director Samuel Levine**. “The FTC will

not stop working with our partners in the states to crack down on deceptive ads and ensure firms that break the rules pay a price.”

In 2019, Google partnered with iHeartMedia and other local radio stations to run an ad campaign for the Google Pixel 4. In these ads, Google required radio personalities to describe their personal experiences using the Pixel 4, despite the phone not yet being available for sale. Google refused to provide the phones to any stations in advance of recording and airing the ads, so the radio personalities’ statements about their experiences using the phone could not be true. One ad in English deceptively exclaimed:

“The only thing I love more than taking the perfect photo? Taking the perfect photo at night. With Google Pixel 4 both are a cinch. It’s my favorite phone camera out there, especially in low light, thanks to Night Sight Mode. I’ve been taking studio-like photos of everything... my son’s football game... a meteor shower... a rare spotted owl that landed in my backyard.”

Google ran the misleading ads in English and Spanish a total of 23,577 times in 10 different media markets across the country, including more than 4,037 times in New York.

As a result of today’s consent judgments, New York will receive \$1,524,621 from Google and \$56,767 from iHeartMedia in civil penalties, cost, and fees. Google is also barred from running ads with false endorsements for its consumer electronic products, operating systems for handheld devices, or any software or consumer-facing feature in any device. The settlements also require the companies to provide related compliance reports to the states. Google will be required to report for three years, and iHeartMedia will be required to report for 10 years.

New York was joined by Arizona, California, Georgia, Illinois, and Massachusetts in the settlement against Google. Texas also joined the group in its settlement against iHeartMedia.

Attorney General James asks any consumer who believes they have been the victim of consumer fraud, to file a [consumer complaint online](#) or contact the Attorney General’s Office Helpline at (800) 771-7755. This matter was handled by Assistant Attorney General Melvin Goldberg of the Consumer Frauds & Protection Bureau, under the supervision of Bureau Chief Jane M. Azia and Deputy Bureau Chief Laura J. Levine. The Consumer Frauds and Protection Bureau is a part of the Division of Economic Justice, which is led by Chief

Deputy Attorney General Chris D'Angelo and overseen by First Deputy Attorney General Jennifer Levy.