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Digital Life

Flower site wilts under complaint deluge

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Ready Flowers managing director Thomas Hegarty. Photo: Sean David Baylis

Scores of complaints against an Australian online florist accused of ruining Valentine's Day surprises by failing to deliver has prompted co-ordinated action by fair trading bodies.

Ready Flowers, which started in Australia in 2005 but has rapidly expanded to 17 countries, promises same-day delivery if you order before 1pm. However, many of this week's Valentine's Day orders were delivered two days late or not at all.

The company was receiving so many complaints on its [Facebook page](#) that it briefly disabled it yesterday. Customers have said they were blocked from posting after leaving complaints.

NSW Fair Trading said it had received "a number of complaints" and had appointed a case officer to handle complaints relating to Ready Flowers. It is understood dedicated case officers are only appointed for more serious matters.

The Facebook page is now back online and Ready Flowers is asking all of the people who haven't received their deliveries to fill in a survey via a Facebook app that first asks for permission to use all of the user's information.

Many customers have taken to websites such as [productreview.com.au](#), [Whirlpool](#) and [fair-trading.com](#) to complain about Ready Flowers.

John, who did not want his full name published, lives in Sydney's Eastern Suburbs and ordered \$150 worth of flowers from [ReadyFlowers.com.au](#) for Valentine's Day. He left his order a bit late but chose Ready Flowers because of the same day delivery guarantee.

John placed his order about 10.40am and the order tracker showed it was delivered or in transit at 2.45pm. "No delivery, and definitely not the next day, and not the day after," he said.

Calls to the 1800 number on the Ready Flowers website went to a recording and John was unable to leave a message, and he couldn't get through to a human at any of the other 1800 numbers for the other countries. He said the live chat support service didn't work and emails were responded to by a robot two days later.

John is disputing the charges with his bank and claims to have logged a complaint with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC).

Most of the other complaints made by customers online and seen by this website are to do with non-delivery and an inability to get in contact with the company. Some said they received the wrong orders.

"Flowers ordered for Valentines day still have not been delivered – 3 days later! Their call centre is shut & their facebook page is closed," wrote one user on Whirlpool.

One of the latest complaints on the company's Facebook wall reads: "Your company is making fun of your customers. I tried everything you offer to get in contact with you, but still haven't heard anything. I sit back with a bitter wife she hasn't talked to me for 2 days since you couldn't deliver my order."

On productreview.com.au, out of 55 reviews, 50 rate Ready Flowers one star. "Paid \$230 for 24 roses..still waiting..blocked from their facebook page for comments about them..no replies from email and phone," wrote one user.

The company essentially operates like a call centre, forwarding orders on to around 2000 local florists depending on where the customer is from.

It is owned by the Hegarty family in Western Australia but managing director Thomas Hegarty now lives in Hong Kong driving the international expansion, according to his [LinkedIn profile](#). He did not respond to a request for comment today.

According to an ASIC company extract, the company's directors Deborah and ██████████ Hegarty are located in Manning in Perth. They could not be reached this morning.

NSW Fair Trading said Consumer Protection in Western Australia was the "lead agency in handling this matter", however, the NSW regulator has "received a number of complaints about this trader and has appointed a case officer to handle complaints".

"A number of complaints have already been resolved and we encourage any consumers who have experienced problems to lodge a formal complaint, via the website at www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au or at any Fair Trading Centre," a spokeswoman said.

"Under the Australian consumer Law, consumers are provided with guarantees in relation to the goods and services they purchase. These guarantees provide protection in the event goods are not received or are not as represented."

The ACCC has been approached for comment.

In a November 2009 article in the Australian Financial Review, Thomas Hegarty said the secret to his rapid expansion was good search-engine optimisation, Google advertising, and creating landing pages on the website for every suburb to which it delivers.

"We saw that we could add value by applying more efficient technology without needing a large number of people to run the business," Hagerty said at the time.

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