

Judge backs blogger's fight against fraud

By ROB KIDD

A FRAUDSTER'S victim who fought back has won a landmark battle to name and shame the man who scammed him and dozens of others.

Nearly two and a half years ago, Steve Taylor contracted Grant Norman King to build a sleepout for his elderly father behind the family home in West Auckland. Taylor paid three-quarters of the price - \$23,500 - as a deposit. The sleepout was never built and the money was not returned.

In a bid to get even, Taylor brought civil proceedings against King but when the cost of continuing the case became prohibitive, he took a different tack, setting up the website grantnormanking.com with the intention of warning others who might be drawn in.

Within months other victims were clamouring to tell their stories and it was not long before Taylor built a comprehensive timeline of King's offending.

King then tried to turn the legal tables on Taylor by using the Harassment Act to sue Taylor and demand the website be taken down.

Taylor was forced into Auckland District Court to defend himself.

However, that was King's mistake. "What he did was open up the opportunity for every other victim to tell their story, which was the very thing he was advocating against," Taylor said.

Affidavits in support of Taylor's cause flooded in and he said it was surreal to be standing in court with the public gallery full of people backing him.

In court Judge David Wilson sided with Taylor and said the website, with all its explosive accusations, could remain online. "It would be inappropriate if a man in Mr King's position could close down postings of essentially factual material on the basis that it interferes with his commercial plans and deprives him of customers," the judge said.

"I accept Mr King is distressed by the postings but in my view that distress arises because he would prefer potential customers were unaware of his history and is not such as justifies the making of restraining orders."

Lawyer Madeleine Flanagan, who advised Taylor and has been the victim of online harassment herself, said the judge's decision showed free speech was alive and well.


She said the unique nature of the case, setting a new precedent in harassment laws, meant it was already being used by media law professors at Auckland University.



Online hero: Steve Taylor, above, pursued Graham King for fraud via an online campaign.

Photo: David White / Fairfax NZ



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Steve Taylor

Taylor vowed to continue his campaign against the scammer, whom he labelled "a classical sociopath".

King rejected the criticism of him and said he was now working as a salesman for a bike company, putting his criminal past behind him.

"I have moved on and I do not deserve the sort of treatment that he's [Taylor] given me," he said. "I've been kicked from one end of the country to the other by this guy for two years with absolute bullshit mixed in with a little bit of fact and I've had enough of it."

He was defeated in the recent court hearing because of the "presentation of the case", King said, but it was not his only way of hitting back at the blogger. "I'm not going to say what my next step is because I'm not going to telegraph that," he said.

Taylor was sceptical of King's claim he had changed his ways. "I've been relentless in the pursuit of justice... I don't think he's going to stop, but neither am I," he said.

Taylor's website also resulted in King being punished. Since setting up the website, Taylor said more than 70 victims had come forward, across a 32-year span, claiming losses of more than \$3 million.

As a result, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment and the Ministry of Social Development began their own investigations, which ultimately led to eight convictions against King for fraud. According to Taylor's timeline, the pattern of dishonesty started when King was convicted of receiving stolen vehicles in 1982.