

2016-78: Kate Musgrove vs Financial Post

February 15, 2017 - *For immediate release*

The National NewsMedia Council has dismissed a complaint about unattributed use of material in an article in the Financial Post.

Complainant Kate Musgrove said the November 23, 2016 Financial Post article, “Black Friday deals 2016: the best bargains in Canada and where to find them”, contained material “directly copied from original content written by RedFlagDeals editorial staff” and that the copy was used without permission or sufficient attribution.

The complainant argued that the links back to RedFlagDeals.ca did not give proper attribution to the original source, citing six instances where the Financial Post article did not credit RedFlagDeals as the source. She stated the article gave the misleading impression that the Financial Post curated the material.

The Financial Post described the article as aggregated content. It stated that the article repeatedly directed readers back to RedFlagDeals, and noted that a similar aggregation the previous year elicited a favourable tweet from RedFlagDeals.

The news media organization refuted the assertion that the article claimed the information was compiled by the Financial Post. It said it did not make use of commentary from RedFlagDeals, and pointed out that the aggregation sent readers directly to the RedFlagDeals site for more details.

Council found the article in question is largely a list of retail opportunities timed for a prime shopping season. The article itself was a brief introduction followed by a straightforward list of items grouped by category, with links for more information and sources. It was described by the news media organization as the same type of aggregation done by Google and The Huffington Post.

The source of the listed material is identified by means of links at the end of each section to the relevant websites, including RedFlagDeals, a method that is understood as giving credit to those sources.

In reviewing the article and materials submitted, Council noted the content was selected by the newsroom, and as such should meet the newsroom’s journalistic standards and ethics.

The article in question carried a 'Financial Post staff' byline, which contained links to another article published by the FP. This article was originally compiled by RedFlagDeals and carried with it the complainant's byline. In dismissing the complaint, however, Council noted there is no indication that the Financial Post claimed to have compiled the lists.

While the links served to credit RedFlagDeals as source of the retail information, future best practice may be to distinguish clearly between news items and aggregated copy, with byline credit given to third party contributors.