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Home Security Firm Cries Foul Over Tactics

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RICHMOND, Va. (CN) - A home security company says three deceitful competitors convinced its customers to switch to their services by impersonating alarm systems technicians, a federal lawsuit claims.

In a lawsuit filed in Richmond Federal Court on October 2, plaintiff General Security Inc. says sales reps for Utah-based home security dealers Elite Home Security and NorthStar Alarm Services approached its customers while masquerading as alarm systems technicians telling tales of service disruptions and financial penalties.

Some salesmen purported to be General employees, claiming Elite had bought out the company and that customer contracts were no longer valid, while others posed as service technicians for home alarm manufacturers whose systems were overdue for an upgrade, the complaint says.

Many reps assisted customers in concealing the switch by cancelling service after right of rescission had ended and citing fake excuses such as death or change of address, the company claims.

The dealers then later sold the contracts to non-party Monitronics International in Dallas, Texas.

One savvy consumer who was suspicious of the "technicians" who showed up at his door, told General that two unidentified sales reps refused to leave his doorstep until he threatened to call police, according to the complaint.

Video surveillance footage taken on a Richmond woman's porch allegedly shows Elite salesman Andrew Stock, also named as a defendant in the suit, pretending to be a Honeywell rep in his pitch - a "particularly egregious" lie as Elite neither manufactured, sold nor monitored the customer's alarm system, General Security claims.

In the recording, Stock allegedly says he was sent to the customer's home to update her phone line panel which would soon be discontinued, rendering her liable to the company, according to the suit.

"I'm here with Honeywell. We make the equipment for General Security," Stock allegedly told the customer. "Right now, Honeywell, the equipment manufacturer, they're not sponsoring General Security anymore ... that's why my shirt says Monitronics."

General Security claims several customers later identified Stock and co-defendant NorthStar salesman Jaime Villareal by their Facebook photos, while the identities of 10 "John Doe" defendants remain unknown.

It also says the customers it knows were approached as part of the alleged scheme, "are likely only a small fraction of the total number of General's customers that have been subjected to the deceptive and illegal business practices," and that its business has suffered as a result.

General Security seeks compensatory and punitive damages as well as injunctive relief on claims of unfair competition, deceptive practices, interference with contractual relations, interference with prospective economic advantage, and defamation.

The company is represented by Adam Kleinberg and Kevin Levine of Sokoloff Stern, in New York, and Richard Milnor, of Zunka, Milnor & Carter in Charlottesville, Va.

Representatives of most of the defendants did not respond to requests for comment from Courthouse News.

Counsel for Elite Jason Yancey declined to comment on the pending suit. 

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