

Jury Awards Photographer \$1 Million After Couple Trashes Her Online Over \$125

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Andrea Polito.

Photo courtesy of CBS.[/caption]

Summary: A wedding couple had told local news that a photographer was holding their wedding photos "hostage."

A Dallas couple was angry with their wedding photographer for charging \$125 for an album cover photo. To retaliate, they went on a social media rampage to trash the photographer's reputation, and on Friday, a judge ruled that they must now pay damages of a *million dollars!*

"I was proud of my accomplishments, what I have done. They took that away from me," the photographer said to *Dallas News*. "It's been a fight for myself to get my reputation back."

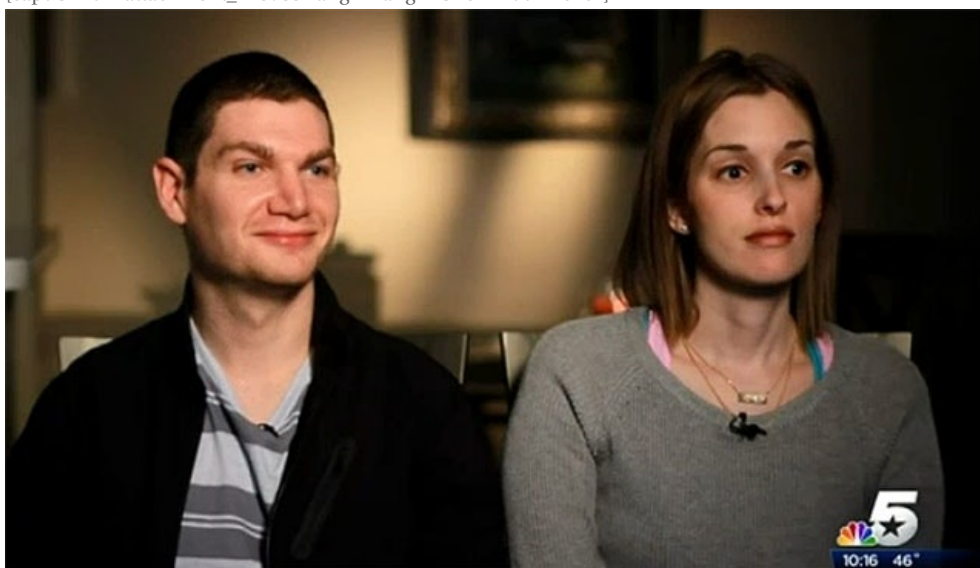
According to *CBS*, a jury awarded photographer Andrea Polito \$1 million because the couple had defamed her online and in the local news. The jury said the couple had committed defamation because they were fueled by malice.

In Polito's lawsuit that was filed in 2015, she said that she had agreed to shoot the wedding of blogger Neely Moldovan and her husband, Andrew. She said that she had given them a contract that stated her terms of delivery.

Polito said that after the wedding the Moldovans had requested that their wedding photos be forwarded to them, but that she reminded them that the contract said they must first submit an order form and pick an album cover photo, which costs \$125.

After weeks of back and forth, Polito said she planned to eat the cost of the \$125 to please the Moldovan's who refused to pay. However, before she could talk to the couple, she learned that they had contacted local news station and said that Polito was holding their wedding photos "hostage."

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Andrew and Neely

Moldovan appearing on NBC.[/caption]

Polito's Yelp page was bombed with one-star reviews after the news story ran in January of 2015, but Yelp eventually removed them for violating terms of service.

According to Polito's lawsuit, the angry couple also allegedly smeared Polito's reputation online, on social media and wedding-related blogs.

Polito said that she no longer was willing to shoot because of the backlash.

"I felt completely dead," Polito said to *CBS Dallas*. "You know it was my passion and I loved my clients and I loved what I did."

Polito told *Dallas News* that the couple had ruined her business. She said that she typically booked almost 100 weddings a year

but after their angry campaign she only booked two weddings in 2015.

The jury found the couple liable for defamation, disparagement and civil conspiracy. They were represented by attorney T. Chase Garrett, who had no comment for *CBS*.

Polito's attorney Dave Wishnew of Gruber Elrod Johansen Hail Shank LLP said that the jury concluded the case after a few hours of deliberation. He said that this case is an example of people needing to be prudent when posting their thoughts on the internet.

"No one is saying you can't go and write a review," Wishnew said. "Freedom of speech is not freedom from consequence. Things you put on the internet to attack a business have real-world consequences and that really resonated with the jury. You can't go and burn someone's house down and claim free speech."

The couple has an option to appeal, and Polito told *Dallas News* that she was looking forward to moving on and rebuilding her brand.

"I'm emotionally exhausted. This has been a very long battle," Polito said. "Last Friday when the verdict was read I felt a little bit relieved, but most importantly, I feel my reputation was restored to myself. What's been so hard the past couple of years has been feeling so ashamed of this story."

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What do you think of Andrea Polito's case? Let us know in the comments below.