

Assignment 1 - Solution
Case to Analyze: Garage Online Auction

Please note that this is an example of a solution, rather than the only correct solution.

1. Detailed case description

Participants and their roles

1. Humans 2 pts.

Wendy Jones Stared an auction sale on the Internet called GARAGE that is targeted for young people between 16 to 25 years old. After a careful analysis of the existing web site, she decided to have an anti-establishment feel for her site.

GARAGE Users Some users post adds with items to be auctioned on the site. Other will buy items posted on the site. If some users are interested to buy items and they want to find more details about certain products they can check the GI component, an advice service provided by the site.

GI Experts Users of the GARAGE system that declare themselves as experts and provide additional information for various items present on the site.

Woman that was killed A GARAGE user bought martial arts weapons and unintentional killed a 25 years old woman.

2. Non-Human Agents 0.5 pts

GARAGE Site Internet site for auctions that will publish classified advertisements for items posted by sellers. A site intended for people of 16 to 25 years old and that will adopt a policy to market items of interest for this age. The site tracks the users to ensure a growing business. The monetary benefit of the site comes from the fees requested from the people that post ads, and from those that register as GI experts, and from a percentage of prices of a sold item.

The site will also give a commission to the GI experts for each access of information posted. This commission will be part of the fee for completed sales.

3. Try to “see” the ethical issues 1.5pts

Ethical Questions

1. A woman was killed by a GARAGE user with a martial arts weapon purchased from the GARAGE site. Who is responsible for this tragic situation? It was an intended murder or an accident?
2. If the murder was an accident, can anyone be blamed for negligence and irresponsibility? Or it was simply an unfortunate accident that could not have been foreseen or prevented?

Worries

1. Wendy Jones should check carefully the expert’s credibility, the information that they provide for various items, and also the items that are posted for sale since the site is targeted for young people.
2. The site tracks the users, some privacy issues may come up.

4. Use your ethical reasoning skills 1.5pts

Precedents and similarities The GARAGE site can be seen as a site that is intended to sell items that can not be purchased from stores, due to legal issues, by young people. Taking the fact that Wendy Jones felt sorry about the accident and also she felt vindicated by her strategy shows that GARAGE was not intended only for illegal items.

Objectors Concerned parents, older people can object of the GARAGES’s adopted policy to accept expert information from people that don’t have their credential checked and also of the type of items that are posted on the site.

Key issues are likely to be: i) whether anyone intentionally caused harm, ii) whether any laws were broken, iii) whether anyone was culpably negligent, iv) whether anyone should be punished and how, v) how can the family of the young women can be compensated for their lost if this is possible.

Standing “in other person’s shoes” The family of the woman that was killed wants justice to be made. Wendy Jones feels sorry for the accident caused by one of her site users. She might think that all the blame is to be put on the GI expert. The user that killed the woman might think that all the blame stands on the GI expert and on the site side.

Conclusions

Wendy Jones started an auction sale site for young people. She wanted to create something new that would be a good investment.

Because she did not carefully check the information that GARAGE users post for various items, one of the users she bought a martial art weapon and killed by accident a woman. The buyer did not know that his acquisition can be deadly if it is not used properly, the expert information provided by the site was not clear enough.

5a. Perform a “roles and responsibilities analysis”

2pts

Wendy Jones roles and responsibilities As an owner of the auction site, she should be more careful regarding the items that are auctioned and regarding the information that expert users post on the site. At least some category of items should be put under a stricter and “microscope” view.

GI expert roles and responsibilities make a complete description for the items that he chooses to analyze. He should be more responsible and make a deeper analysis especially for the items that are dangerous. He should think if the items are a danger for the user and not only and be sure to state this in the description.

Star weapon buyer roles and responsibilities He should insure that he knows exactly how to use the weapon.

Star weapon manufacturer Explicit instruction on how to handle and use the star weapon should be provided by the manufacturer. The product is dangerous to use and therefore the detailed instructions should be present.

5b. Perform a “stakeholder analysis”

2pts

Woman that was killed Due to an unfortunate event she lost her life.

Star weapon buyer After the tragic accident he will have to deal for the rest of his life with the thought of killing a woman.

GI expert He will live with a possible guilt that because of the missing information the star weapon buyer killed by accident the woman.

Wendy Jones She might lose the GARAGE site.

5c. Perform a “systematic policy analysis” 1pts

Internet auctions Is it legal for this type of items to be auctioned on a site that is intended for young people.

5d. Perform an “ethical theory analysis” 1.5pts

Utilitarian points Wendy Jones primary thought of a way to create an auction site that will bring her good profit by targeting young people. Having made such a decision she should have thought of the special risks that may come along having young people as buyers. GI expert did not take careful into account the risk of revealing information regarding special items like weapons. He knew that if an item for which he added his expert knowledge will be sold a monetary benefit will come.

Aristotelian points Virtues like responsibility were neglected by Wendy Jones, GI expert and also the weapon buyer. Wendy Jones is guilty of the "sin" of ignoring the risks - of facilitating selling unknown merchandise and GI Experts ignored the risk of giving opinions that will be used to judge what situation is safe and what is not.

GARAGE site ended up to suggest that is not a reliable site since the information that it provides for certain auctioned items is not complete.

Star weapon buyer let his interest in the martial arts weapons prevail over his responsibility of using such items.

Kantian points Star weapon buyer trusted the information on the GARAGE site too much. GI experts expressed lack of respect for the users of the auction system.

6. Draw some key ethical conclusions 2pts

A. GARAGE site should be more careful and check the items that are sold on the site and also the information that the expert users are providing.

B. GI experts should make a deeper analysis and be careful to include all the information regarding the items that they analyze.

7. Draw some lessons for the future 1pts

Internet auctions and especially the ones that target young people need to be reliable in information and have to proceed under legal laws, not to auction illegal items.

Users of dangerous items should be fully informed to use the item. Ethical laws should be targeted for auctions on the internet since they can be international and certain items can be illegally used in some countries.

