

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 15, 2018

Ms. Marissa Mayer  
Chief Executive Officer  
Yahoo  
701 1st Ave  
Sunnyvale, CA 94089

Dear Ms. Mayer:

We are writing to express our deep concern about the role that internet search engines, such as Yahoo, may play in facilitating the deadly drug trade. As such, we request that Yahoo consider removing from its platform content that advertises the use of or enables the sale of illicit narcotics, including the sale of prescription drugs without a valid prescription. We further request that Yahoo consider action to ensure that future, similar content is banned.

We understand it is Yahoo's policy that "pharmacies must be well-known, reputable companies that require an actual doctor's prescription to purchase medication, and be approved by VIPPS, or through other NABP certification programs" in order to advertise on its platform.<sup>1</sup> We also understand that it is Yahoo's policy to disallow advertisements for "any recreational drugs or drug paraphernalia, or products and services designed to beat drug tests. This includes drugs which may be legal or decriminalized in some regions, such as marijuana."<sup>2</sup>

Despite this, the online sale of illicit narcotics, including the sale of prescription drugs without a valid prescription, is easily facilitated through the search engines of Yahoo and other providers, as evidenced by the attachments to this letter and in a recent United States Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations report.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, in 2015, the Global Drug Survey, which

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<sup>1</sup>Yahoo. Yahoo advertising policies. Available: <https://ush.adspecs.yahoo.com/pages/yahooadvertisingpolicies/?rnd=1#Section3o>

<sup>2</sup> Yahoo. Yahoo advertising policies. Available: <https://ush.adspecs.yahoo.com/pages/yahooadvertisingpolicies/?rnd=1#Section2g>

<sup>3</sup>United States Senate, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. (January 25, 2018). "Combatting the opioid crisis: Exploiting vulnerabilities in international mail." P. 26. Available: [file:///C:/Users/k149473/Downloads/Combatting%20the%20Opioid%20Crisis%20-%20Exploiting%20Vulnerabilities%20in%20International%20Mail1%20\(3\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/k149473/Downloads/Combatting%20the%20Opioid%20Crisis%20-%20Exploiting%20Vulnerabilities%20in%20International%20Mail1%20(3).pdf)

included 100,000 participants worldwide, found that nearly 12,000 respondents had purchased drugs online, from conventional, surface websites, as well as from “darknet” sites.<sup>4</sup>

As you may be aware, the Ryan Haight Online Pharmacy Consumer Protection Act, which was enacted in 2008, requires at least one in-person consultation with a physician in order to obtain a valid prescription to purchase a controlled substance through an online pharmacy. This law further requires all online pharmacies to register with the Drug Enforcement Administration, and to post basic information about their location, pharmacist in charge, and any physician with whom they are affiliated. Unfortunately, it appears that some of the pharmacies using Yahoo to advertise their services are not in compliance with this law.

We recognize that not all purchases of illicit narcotics, to include prescription drugs without a valid prescription, are facilitated by Yahoo’s platform. However, Yahoo can play a role in helping to stem the tide of overdose deaths associated with illicit drug use by ensuring its users cannot purchase such products using its platform. To that end, we request that you consider:

- ensuring that when users search for medicines on your platform, they are automatically directed to websites connected to legal and legitimate pharmacies that require a valid prescription as a condition of sale;
- disabling the ability to search for illicit drugs through your platform;
- reporting to law enforcement authorities when Yahoo receives information indicating that a company is advertising the use of or attempting to sell illicit narcotics or prescription drugs without a valid prescription online, and provide the relevant IP information;
- establishing a 24/7 telephone point of contact whom law enforcement can directly communicate with regarding these instances (instead of an email point of contact); and
- incorporating training for Yahoo security reviewers (or their appropriate equivalent) to enable them to better recognize the companies purchasing domains through your search engine that promote or facilitate the online sale of illicit drugs and/or prescription drugs without a valid prescription.

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<sup>4</sup> Pegg, D. (June 7, 2015). “Global Drug Survey 2015 shows more people buying online than ever before.” *The Guardian*. Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/datablog/2015/jun/08/global-drug-survey-2015-buy-online-darknet-silk-road>


Drug overdose deaths claimed the lives of nearly 64,000 Americans in 2016.<sup>4</sup> Based on the attachments and the data above, a portion of these substances may have been purchased via the internet, facilitated by illegitimate pharmacies exploiting online search engines. We cannot turn a blind eye to this activity.

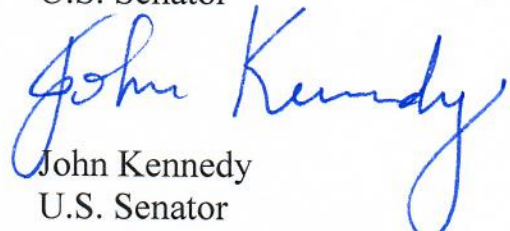
We strongly request that you consider taking action. Thank you for your consideration of this very serious matter. We look forward to your reply.


Sincerely,

  
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U.S. Senator

  
Charles Grassley  
U.S. Senator

  
Amy Klobuchar  
U.S. Senator

  
John Kennedy  
U.S. Senator

  
Sheldon Whitehouse  
U.S. Senator

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<sup>4</sup> Hedegaard H., Warner M., Miniño A.M. (2017) *Drug overdose deaths in the United States, 1999–2016*. NCHS Data Brief, No 294. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. Available: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db294.pdf>

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www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2018/01/the...  
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can i buy oxycodone online ?

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7 answers

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