

California's attorney general takes action against GDS*

Notorious company now banned from doing business in the state

On Dec. 8, 2017, Xavier Becerra, the attorney general of California, officially revoked the contractor's licenses of GDS (aka Global Development Strategies, Garage Door Services, Garage Door Service & Repair, Neighborhood Garage Door Services, et al.). The action bars GDS from doing business in the state.

Becerra's action is the result of more than two years of work by the state's Contractors State License Board (CSLB), which piled up dozens of violations by GDS. This license revocation means that GDS must wait five years before applying for reissuance or reinstatement of license.

"If they do apply after that time, there is no guarantee that the license will be reissued," said Rick Lopes, CSLB chief of public affairs.

"The strongest step CSLB can take is to revoke a company's license; that's what's happened in this case," he added. "Without a license, the company can no longer operate legally in the state."

But did that stop them?

Even though GDS is barred from doing business in the state, we asked two California residents in two different markets to call GDS for garage door repair services. In both cases, GDS said that they would provide services promptly. This was in February, two months after the license was revoked.

On Yelp, 20 different California customers of GDS have posted reviews of the company's services *after* GDS had been banned from providing services in the state. The reviews are dated in December (after the 8th), January, and February.

"In general, if a company continues to operate in California after their license is revoked, we would likely pursue criminal charges with a local prosecutor for contracting without a license, or [pursue the situation] administratively by issuing a citation," said Lopes.

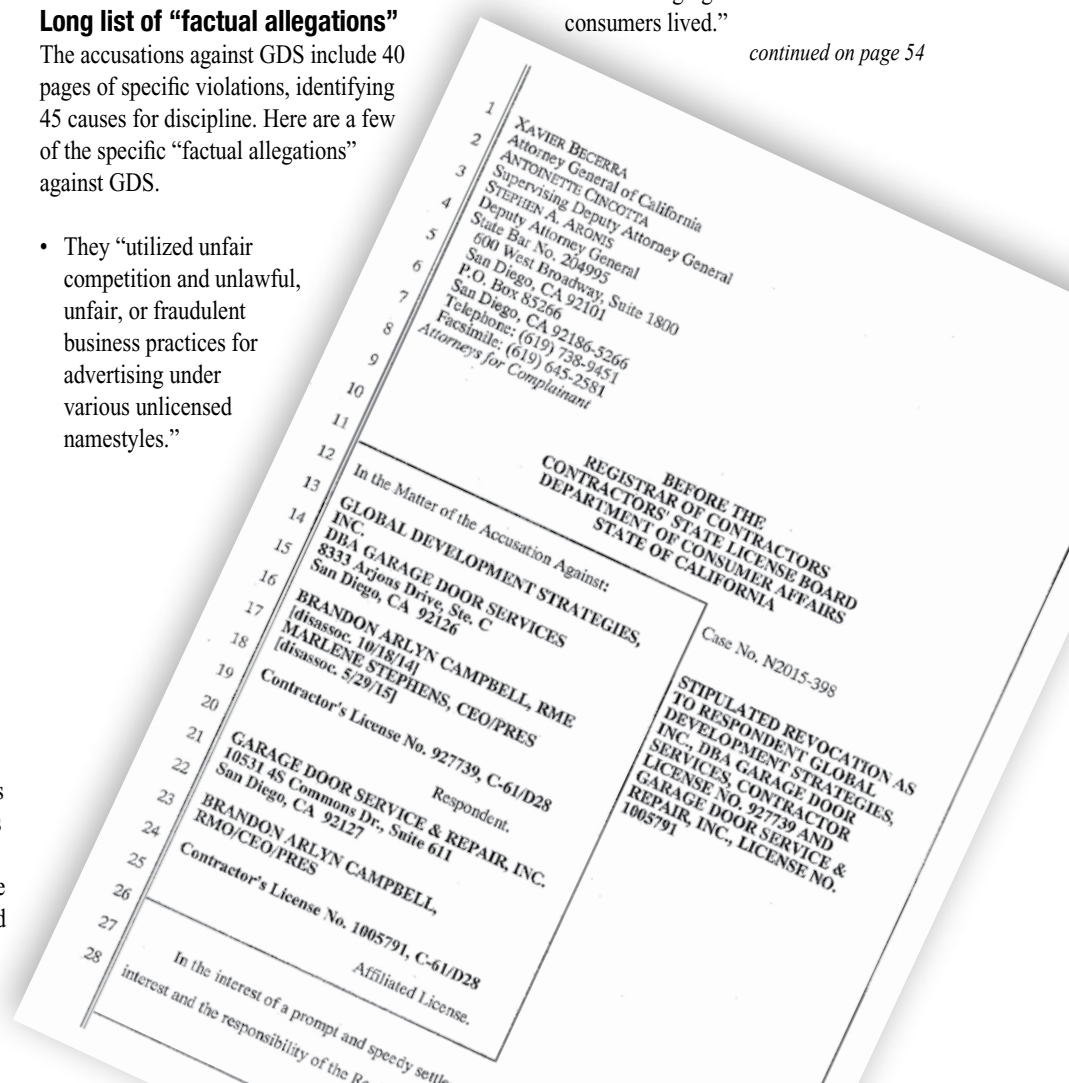
Long list of "factual allegations"

The accusations against GDS include 40 pages of specific violations, identifying 45 causes for discipline. Here are a few of the specific "factual allegations" against GDS.

- They "utilized unfair competition and unlawful, unfair, or fraudulent business practices for advertising under various unlicensed namestyles."

- Some of the names used by GDS were declared to be "closely resembling the names of legitimate licensed companies that were doing business in a particular area."
- GDS also "utilized unfair, deceptive, untrue, or misleading advertising by misleading consumers with telephone numbers with area codes belonging to the areas where the consumers lived."

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- GDS also advertised AARP and senior citizen discounts, but then was “considerably overcharging the senior citizen consumers for services rendered.”
- GDS was “overcharging the elderly consumers, then pressing the consumers to sign a document on an iPad, not providing the consumers with a hard copy of the contract upon payment.”
- In the long list of accusations, the state described GDS activities as “fraudulent” 12 times.

Pay fines and restitution

As part of the legal action by Attorney General Bacerra, GDS must also pay \$21,170.58 in investigation/enforcement costs; pay a disciplinary bond of an amount between \$15,000 and \$150,000; and pay restitution to three specified victims in the amount of about \$2,500.

The state's revocation decision was

signed by Brandon Campbell on behalf of Global Development Strategies, DBA Garage Door Services (license #927739) and Garage Door Service & Repair (license #1005791).

Note: We contacted GDS and asked for their side of the story in regard to their California license and the Yelp Consumer Alerts. We sent our request to Jason Romo (GDS general manager) and to Ernest Leonard, a Dallas attorney for GDS. They did not respond. ■

**GDS goes by hundreds of names. As of early 2018, their primary name is Neighborhood Garage Door Service. They are also known by variations of Yes Garage Door Service, Five Star Garage Door Repair, Jimmy's Garage Doors, Patriot Garage Doors, Fox Overhead Garage Doors, Garage Door Services, Global Development Strategies, and hundreds more. "Garage Door Services of Houston" is a different company that has no connection with this GDS.*

Yelp issues Consumer Alert against GDS

Yelp, the popular consumer review site, has posted a Consumer Alert that warns consumers about reviews for Neighborhood Garage Door Services (alias GDS). Yelp posted “evidence” that the company has been making deals with customers in exchange for reviews, in violation of Yelp's rules.

In February, consumers would have seen the warning if they checked Yelp for reviews of the company. The Yelp alert appeared for at least 26 Neighborhood Garage Door Services' locations: Atlanta, Austin, Charlotte, N.C., Cincinnati, Columbus, Denver, El Paso, Houston, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Minneapolis, Oklahoma City, Orange County, Calif., Orlando, Phoenix, Portland, Ore., Raleigh, N.C., Riverside, Calif., Sacramento, San Antonio, San Diego, San Francisco, St. Louis, Stamford, Conn., Tampa, Tulsa, and possibly elsewhere.

