

# Target 8: Bogus locksmith listings

## Better Business Bureau aware of tactic

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- Henry Erb

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (WOOD) - There are hundreds of listings online and in printed phone books for locksmiths in the Grand Rapids area. All have local addresses.

Most of those addresses are bogus.

Target 8 investigators found no locksmiths but a restaurant, a pizza take out location, a vacant store front and a tavern among the listings.

The phone numbers all begin with "616-272..."

The numbers with the fake local addresses overwhelm the few listings for actual local locksmiths. One of them, Tom Ziemer, said, "As far as I could tell, they do that so when that person gets locked out, they go down the list of addresses and they find one that's very close to them. So they expect to get service within five or 10 minutes and it ends up taking an hour."

The recent flood of locksmith listings in the Grand Rapids area appear to be the work of one New Jersey company called USA Locksmith, also known as Prestige Business Solutions, according to corporate records.

Target 8 investigators found 57 different business names for that company registered with the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth. We counted 229 listings in the AT&T phone book and another 200 on yellowbook.com.

USA Locksmith didn't return our call for comment. It isn't the only nationwide company.

The Better Business Bureau has warned about several national companies all operating in a similar fashion. There have been allegations of poor workmanship and price gouging - overcharging by hundreds of dollars in some cases in other states.

The Federal Trade Commission has also warned about bogus locksmiths and has a Web page of advice on avoiding trouble.

Local locksmiths worry about losing business and the reputation of their industry. They say there has been an impact in other cities where the national companies have operated.

Local locksmiths have been trying to get the phone company to eliminate those listings with phony addresses. AT&T said its policy is that "a valid listing must accurately reflect the name of a local business operated from the address shown."

AT&T said it has eliminated 90,000 bogus locksmith listings from directories in 22 states and is continuing to do that. But there are other directories.

Target 8 investigators tried to check out allegations of possible overcharging. We locked a set of keys in a van and stood by with undercover cameras while calling one of those "272" numbers in the Grand Rapids phone book with an address on South Division Avenue -- an unoccupied building. What we got was a call center and a referral to a "technician" in Detroit who said he had nobody in Grand Rapids who could unlock our van.

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He ended up recommending we call an actual local "store front" locksmith for help.