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Ellen Degeneres Not Amused By Photog's Billboard Stunt



Artist's rendering of the billboard Madalyn Ruggiero attempted to put up for six weeks in West Hollywood.

Television personality and talk show host Ellen Degeneres—and her show's lawyers—were not amused by an Ohio freelance photographer's recent publicity stunt, and their legal action has cost the photographer thousands of dollars.

Photographer [Madalyn Ruggiero](#) created a small business by putting costumes on her dog, Denali, photographing him, then [selling greeting cards bearing the images](#). Buoyed by the success of her cards and Denali's 27,000+ Facebook fans, Ruggiero bought billboard space in West Hollywood in an attempt to get Ellen Degeneres to put Denali on her TV talk show. "Ellen," the billboard read, "Denali the dog wants to meet you!"

Just days after the billboard went up on February 13, the show's lawyers ordered the billboard company to take it down because, they argued, it traded on Degeneres's name and likeness (Ruggiero dressed Denali up to look like Degeneres for the billboard).

Ruggiero says that the billboard company's lawyers sought and received approval from Warner Brothers, which owns and produces Degeneres' show, prior to putting up the billboard. The ad should have been displayed for six weeks but was up for only a few days.

"I was shocked and confused why my harmless billboard was removed," Ruggiero says. "When I spoke with the billboard company they were very cold and told me nothing."

The LA Times, Today Show and MSNBC have all published stories about Ruggiero's run-in with Degeneres' lawyers.

"I meant no harm with my billboard," Ruggiero explains. "I am disappointed and confused. Denali is getting old and I thought trying to get Denali on Ellen's would be fun. I always thought she was a huge dog lover, but I was mistaken."

Now Ruggiero is out thousands of dollars for a publicity stunt gone awry. Should Ruggiero have known better? Maybe. Should we be surprised that Degeneres responded with legal threats rather than a sense of humor? Probably not.

Tags: [Denali](#), [Ellen Degeneres](#), [Facebook](#), [Madalyn Ruggiero](#)

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Stan Douglas: Disco Angola (6 Photos) | Photo of the Day
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Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner, New York
Above: Capoeira, 1974, 2012. Fine art photograph by Stan Douglas impersonating photojournalist for his last body of work, called Disco Angola, now on display at the David Zwirner gallery

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