

# Media Release

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## False billers prosecuted

Two scammers squeezing money out of businesses to pay for unauthorised advertisements in the Touring SA magazine today have been convicted and ordered to complete community service.

In the Elizabeth Magistrates Court today Dwayne Joseph Watts and Steven Scott Bastian, formerly both trading as Blue Chip Publishing of Salisbury Downs, pleaded guilty to invoicing businesses for magazine advertisements they had never authorised. Watts pleaded guilty to 20 counts and Bastian pleaded guilty to 10 counts. Watts also pleaded guilty to a further 3 counts of making statements about a sponsorship or approval that the publication did not have. The Court has ordered Watts to complete 320 hours of community service and Bastian 170 hours.

In some instances the businesses were contacted by telephone. Some businesses declined the advertisement opportunity, only to find that the advertisements appeared in the publication anyway. In other instances, businesses were invoiced for advertisements that appeared in a magazine without any prior contact from Blue Chip Publishing or authorisation from the businesses concerned.

The Office of Consumer and Business Affairs (OCBA) instigated an investigation and sought out scammed organisations after receiving a complaint from a business. OCBA found a number of businesses had concerns about unsolicited advertisements appearing in an edition of the "Touring SA" publication. The businesses had been invoiced for the advertisements. OCBA also found that representatives of Blue Chip Publishing falsely represented to a number of potential advertisers that the magazine had the sponsorship or approval of organisations including the South Australian Tourism Commission and the Clare Valley Tourist Association

Commissioner for Consumer Affairs, Mark Bodycoat said that a variety of businesses were targeted, ranging from a hairdresser, to a local service station and restaurant, to a Post Office.

"The business community was being conned out of thousands of dollars for advertisements that they had never actually ordered."

Sometimes representatives of Blue Chip publishing would phone the businesses trying to induce them to place an advertisement. A refusal did not seem to matter. Businesses were later intimidated or threatened by legal action if they did not pay an invoice for the unauthorised advertisements. Proof of the advertisement and approval were never provided.

"OCBA will continue to prosecute scammers like these where it can, but I strongly encourage businesses to keep accurate records of all advertisements that they authorise, so they are in the best possible position to protect themselves."

Commonwealth, State and Territory fair trading agencies are joining forces against false billers. The agencies exchange information and assist one another to effectively combat the practice.

"These scammers are parasites, and their activities place an unnecessary burden on business. If any business operator suspects they are being targeted by a false billing scam, they should contact OCBA."

For further information about these and other scams, contact the Office of Consumer and Business Affairs on (08) 8204 9588, 131 882 for country areas or visit [www.ocba.sa.gov.au](http://www.ocba.sa.gov.au)



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