

Warwickshire marketing bosses jailed

Appearing at Southwark Crown Court on Friday 28 February, Gareth Donald Onions (66) was jailed for 5 years and 6 months, while David Ronald Webb (73) was jailed for 4 years and 2 months.

The pair, both from Tanworth-in-Arden, Warwickshire, were joined in court by Glenn Andrew Delany (67), from Cotteridge, Birmingham, who was sentenced to 2 years imprisonment, suspended for 2 years, after he helped Gareth Onions and David Webb carry out their offences.

During proceedings, the court heard that Gareth Onions and David Webb bought a field marketing company in 1997, assisting consumer brands market and promote their products in retail outlets. The marketing firm traded as The Brand Company and between 1997 and 2013 operated under the guise of seven different limited liability companies.

However, the last of the seven companies, DSPS Field Marketing Ltd, went into Creditors Voluntary Liquidation in April 2013 after which it was uncovered that Gareth Onions and David Webb not only owed millions to HMRC but they had also breached their directorship disqualifications.

Together with HMRC's Fraud Investigation Service, the Insolvency Service uncovered that The Brand Company submitted their last annual accounts in 2002 before defaulting on their tax liabilities, resulting in a cumulative debt of more than £5 million to HMRC. This was despite the marketing company continuing to deduct tax and National Insurance from their employees' salaries.

To help hide their activities and to prevent any recovery action by their creditors, including HMRC, Gareth Onions and David Webb repeatedly closed the operating company before purchasing the assets themselves through a new company in a succession of pre-pack administration deals.

This allowed the marketing bosses to start up all over again under a different name so that The Brand Company could continue trading undetected.

Further enquiries by the Insolvency Service, also found that the pair had both been disqualified twice while running the marketing company. David Webb received directorship disqualifications in 2008 for 5-and-a-half years and a further 5-year ban in 2010, while Gareth Onions was banned in 2010 for 4 years and another 5- year ban in 2013.

The bans should have restricted their ability to manage limited companies but this did not deter Gareth Onions and David Webb. Throughout this period, not only did the marketing bosses keep the same workforce and deal with existing customers, the pair enjoyed substantial salaries and lavish expenses all billed to the company. This included private healthcare, expensive company cars, golf club membership and the use of company credit cards for personal use.

Ian Hackett, Fraud Investigation Service, HMRC, said:

Onions and Webb deliberately stole taxpayer's money to fund their lifestyle and showed a total disregard for their employees.

By working with partners such as the Insolvency Service, we can effectively tackle tax evasion, which deprives us all of money that should be funding our public services.

We encourage anyone with information about tax evasion to report it online or call our Fraud Hotline on 0800 788 887.

Glenn Wicks, Chief Investigator for the Insolvency Service, said:

Gareth Onions and David Webb employed duplicitous tactics for the majority of The Brand Company's lifetime, in attempt to avoid paying tax, redress any losses owed to their creditors and comply with their disqualifications.

Thanks to the joint work with HMRC, the courts have recognised the severity of their unscrupulous conduct and their sentences should serve as a stark warning to others that we will investigate those that think they can flout their responsibilities as directors and enrich themselves at the expense of the public purse.

His Honour Judge Hehir also made an order for POCA asset confiscation proceedings against all three men.

The sentence result was announced at Southwark Crown Court by HHJ Hehir.

At an earlier hearing on 7 February 2020 at Southwark Crown Court, Gareth Onions pleaded guilty to breaching his directorship disqualification, multiple counts of cheating the public revenue amounting to over £2.6 million and one charge of money laundering.

At the same hearing, David Webb pleaded guilty to one count each of cheating the public revenue of over £1.6 million, of breaching his directorship disqualification and money laundering.

The Finance Director throughout The Brand Company's trading activities, Glenn Delaney, pleaded guilty to one count each of aiding and abetting Onions & Webb in the breach of disqualifications and cheating the public revenue of £348k.

DSPS CONTRACT SERVICES LTD, 1997-2004;

IVYBUSH LTD, 2004-2005;

TIGERPARK LTD, 2005-2008;

DELTAWORLD LTD, 2008-2011;

DSPS REALISATIONS LTD, 2011-2012;

DSPS FIELD MARKETING LTD, 2012-2013

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