



Magazine

**the Greater Baton Rouge Business Report
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Less than two weeks after it hit the streets of Baton Rouge, problems appear to be mounting for one of the city's newest weekly magazines. Investigators with the state attorney general's office said they are looking into Capital City Now Publisher Walt Bennetti's business practices after he allegedly used the names of several area businesses without permission in trying to attract potential advertisers. Investigators also said Bennetti apparently ran several advertisements in the magazine's 40-page inaugural issue that were never purchased by the respective advertisers.

Capital City Now promotional material, obtained by Business Report, reads, "They say that you're known by the company you keep," and then lists to area businesses, including Bank One, Gerry Lane Enterprises, Dillard's and BellSouth Mobility. The material goes on to say, "These companies and many others have committed to invest their advertising dollars with capital City Now."

But Deborah Baer in the attorney general's consumer protection division said several of the listed businesses she contacted told her they never agreed to buy advertising with Bennetti's publication.

"We are going to put them on notice of an. unfair, deceptive business practice," Baer said of the magazine.

Baer said Bennetti's practices "deceive the public" into perceiving the magazine as something it apparently is not.

Several attempts to reach Bennetti last week were unsuccessful. Messages left with the magazine's business number were not returned. Calls paced to Bennetti's New Iberia residence were not answered. The premier issue was released Feb. 18; in the magazine, Bennetti said publication would resume March 4.

Baer's probe was prompted by a complaint lodged by Sandra Lane Garrett, head of a local advertising agency. that also places media buys for her father's car dealerships, Gerry Lane Enterprises.

Garrett said another local advertising agency saw the promotional material in a meeting with Bennetti and called to confirm whether she had committed to advertise in the magazine. Garrett said she didn't have a clue what was going on.

"I can't stand people who take advantage of other people, and it just infuriated me," Garrett said.

She said she had filed a complaint with the Better Business Bureau and that her own attorney had sent Bennetti a cease-and-desist letter.

Garrett also said she had confirmed on her own that all 10 businesses listed in Capital City Now's promotional letter were unaware their names were being used.

"You really feel violated," she said. Baer said she also has learned that several ads appeared in the premier issue of Capital City Now Without ever being purchased by the respective advertisers.

The magazine's back cover, for example, features an ad for the Honda Civic Sedan and includes the names of two local Honda dealers. Representatives for both dealers told Business Report they were unaware the ad was running.

An official with Richards Honda said it appeared Bennetti took an ad that the car maker is running nationally and added the address and telephone numbers of Richards and earn Honda at the bottom.

"We're concerned our name was used without permission," said Harvey Cohen of Richards Honda.

Another half-page ad touts the popular morning show team of Walton and Johnson on WDGLFM "The Eagle" 98.1. Officials with Guaranty Broadcasting said, however, that there was never a formal agreement to run any advertisement.

Guaranty General Manager Greg Herpin said Bennetti approached him shortly before Capital City Now's ad-buying deadline with an offer to trade an ad for announcements on The Eagle.

But Herpin said he declined because the radio station's ad schedule was booked solid. Nevertheless, Bennetti obtained a copy of the station's logo and sent an overnight fax with a mockup of the ad that appeared in the magazine, he said.

"There is no deal," Herpin said. "We didn't buy the ad."

The magazine's inside front cover is a full-page ad for trendy clothes designer Tommy Hilfiger. But a spokeswoman for the company's New York office told Business Report Tommy Hilfiger does not advertise in local or regional publications, and it was unlikely the company purchased the ad space in Capital City Now.

Baer said Bennetti would have 15 days to respond to the notice, which she said would be sent by early this week. If he doesn't respond satisfactorily--agreeing to halt the practice--Baer said she would file a preliminary injunction against Bennetti to stop him.

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