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Corporate Social Responsibility embraces Humanity as SA works to flatten the curve – but beware scammers

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By Donvay Wegierski, Director

Many companies have long engaged in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes involving sustainability, ethics and social impact that aim to give back to society. South African business is no different and, now more than ever, CSR is a must have for businesses wanting to protect their brand during the Corona pandemic.

Perhaps, the real brand risk currently is for business not to act.

Society expects business to help and many South African businesses are doing so despite market uncertainty and the expense involved.

Notwithstanding the race for scientists to formulate a vaccination we are seeing motor vehicle and weapon manufacturers making ventilators; clothing and fabric producers manufacturing masks and face shields; telecom service providers are providing more wireless and mobile data; there are many new and free of charge e-schooling platforms and audio books; online tutorials are free; news channels are available subscription free; banking charges are being waived; feeding schemes are increasing. We will long remember those who are giving back.

However, because of the prevalence of initiatives to help, fraudsters are preying on the goodwill of people.

Unfortunately as we heed the call to stay at home and flatten the curve our online activity has increased. And with it, an increase in cybercrime, phishing and general criminal activity luring people to donate to fake causes, to click on phishing links and buy fake or counterfeit goods.

There has also been a particularly sharp rise in counterfeit pharmaceuticals and protective gear. Worldwide shortages of protective gear has seen a proliferation of fake products. One such example are “N95” masks (being a US certification) available online and subsequently pulled from India, Pakistan and numerous other countries.

Understandably fake or inadequate products place lives at risk therefore the origin and credibility of the website from which products are purchased should be treated with caution. In an effort for brand owners to combat trade mark infringement and counterfeit product the following measures could be considered:

- Google Alerts or anti-counterfeiting services which flag the unauthorised use of brand names;
- Trade mark watching services can be implemented or increased;
- Consider anti-counterfeiting partnerships with likeminded business;
- Educate and inform customers online by including listings of legitimate retailers, posting photographs of genuine product and encouraging reporting of fake or unauthorised product;

- Continue to maintain and protect brands locally and abroad – register and maintain trade marks and domain names, in South Africa and other countries.



Donvay Wegierski

Director

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