

Title : Makeover studio admits to employing aggressive sales tactics

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SINGAPORE: Two days after a timeshare company admitted that it had adopted aggressive sales tactics, another firm, a makeover studio, has owned up to employing similar methods.

And both — taken to court by the Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE) for alleged violation of the Consumers Protection (Fair Trading) Act — have now agreed to be more mindful of their clients' rights.

In a statement, CASE said it had entered a consent judgment in January with makeover studio Naughty By Nature, which had admitted to using hard-selling tactics to get consumers to sign up for their photoshoot packages.

A consent judgment is one in which parties agree to an outcome to settle an issue without going to trial.

Under the terms of the consent judgement, Naughty By Nature agreed, among other things, not to have more than one employee attend to "any female consumer during any sales presentation".

The firm is also not allowed to "detain" any female customer for more than an hour.

Naughty By Nature does not have to shut down, but further complaints could see it being hauled in on a more serious charge of contempt of court.

The case began last September when a district court granted the consumer watchdog's application for an interim injunction against Naughty By Nature. CASE had earlier received many complaints about the studio's sales tactics.

In a typical move, Naughty By Nature would get women to visit its Circular Road office for a free makeover session where they would get to keep several photographs of them in their new look.

Once the pictures were taken, however, the studio's staff would harass the women to take up photoshoot packages that cost thousands of dollars.

CASE said it had received 63 formal complaints, with the studio's customers griping about paying between S\$495 and S\$4,288 to the company.

So far, 15 customers have received refunds in cash or in kind, said CASE executive director Seah Seng Choon.

Naughty By Nature's director Bupendra Ramason refused to comment when contacted, while its other director Raoul Fenianos could not be reached.

The makeover studio's case came not long after timeshare resale firm Global Europ announced that it had entered a consent judgement with CASE. The firm had earlier admitted to using pressure on its customers during sales pitches.

The conclusion of the two cases brings to three the number of errant firms that CASE has taken to court under the four-year-old Act.

While cynics may say three cases in four years suggests that CASE is not doing enough to protect consumers' rights, a lawyer told TODAY that the watchdog deserves credit for its efforts.

Time is needed for CASE to collate complaints and act on them, said **lawyer Vijai Parwani**, since "you would have to discount the exaggeration by some of the consumers".

"If shown that there is a legitimate complaint, CASE would try to reach an amicable resolution with the company concerned before instructing its lawyers to take the matter to court," said **Mr Parwani of Parwani and Co**. "This perhaps gives the impression that CASE has been dragging its feet."

On CASE's part, Mr Seah said the watchdog would "continue to monitor those companies that chalk up high numbers of complaints and are not taking steps to resolve them".

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