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CKDU promo goes awry

By CLAYTON BURNS

CKDU, Dalhousie's student radio station, and Merchant Sampler, a Riverview, New Brunswick promotions and advertising company, are deep in a dispute about a promotion the company ran for the campus radio station.

Charges and counter charges are swirling about the business deal.

Merchant Sampler sold coupon booklets by phone for \$39.95, telling their customers that part of the proceeds would go to Collins House, a shelter for women. CKDU was to get \$2.75 per booklet, and about half of that was to be passed on to Collins House.

Lorne Catton, owner of Merchant Sampler, says that it was CKDU station manager Charles Blair's idea to use Collins House in the promotion. Blair should have told Collins House about the idea, but didn't, Catton says.

The minutes of a CKDU board meeting earlier this fall contain a report from Blair on the Merchant Sampler promotion, in which Blair says that "Collins House was the charity chosen."

He admits he failed to notify Collins House.

But Maria Valverde, a former Merchant Sampler employee, blames her former employers for the fiasco. She says she went to the CBC to complain that Merchant Sampler was exploiting Collins House and paying only \$4.00 per hour to sales staff.

Merchant Sampler managers exhorted employees to "enforce Collins House" as the best selling point of the promotion, Valverde says.

The bonus system for employees involved contests, such as popping balloons for bonuses, depending on the number of booklets they sold each night, she says.

But Cam Fitzsimons, a Merchant Sampler manager, who wrote the speech-page employees read over the phone for the promotion, says he showed his promotion plan to Blair before the telephone calls started, and Blair had no objections. "Lorne and I brought the speech-page to them and before the contract was signed we told them exactly what was in it," he says.

Blair says he didn't know what was in the speech page until a week after the promotion was in full swing.

He says he told Merchant Sampler, "You guys write the read sheet because that's your end."

But, he says, "I would have told them I've got to see the sheet."

The speech-page "gave the impression Collins House was to receive a lot of money from the promotion," he complains.

When Merchant Sampler started calling the public about the booklets, "the shit hit the

fan," Blair says.

After the company and CKDU received pointed questions about why Collins House was mentioned in the promotion, Fitzsimons revised the speech-page.

Catton says the company then pulled out of the CKDU promotion before the contracted ten weeks were up, because no one seemed to know anything about the station. It was too hard to raise money for them, he said.

Merchant Sampler paid CKDU \$1,000, and the station is also holding another \$400, from the company, which was intended for prize money.

Blair says that CKDU might sue Merchant Sampler because the company agreed to raise at least \$500, a week for the station. They owe CKDU a few thousand dollars, he says.

Fitzsimons says Merchant Sampler is talking to its lawyer about possible legal action against the CBC, which ran a news story on the issue.

Collins House still doesn't have any money. Catton says he will send \$700, to them if CKDU doesn't fork over the cash soon. He says CKDU agreed to send on half the money the station got to Collins House, but Blair says he owes Collins House only \$364., which he will pay this week.

Gail Murphy, the director of Collins House, says she doesn't know if the shelter wants money from anyone connected with the CKDU promotion.

"It's been quite disruptive," she says.

According to Anne Merry, a counsellor at the provincial department of Consumer Affairs, Merchant Sampler has been operating in the Halifax area for four or five years.

"We don't get a lot of complaints about them," she says.

Merchant Sampler have come and gone and done their business to the satisfaction of merchants and customers, Merry says.

The Minister of Consumer Affairs, Laird Stirling, said in November that he will recommend that legislation be introduced to control promotion companies that raise money for charities. Some independent promotion companies give as little as 20 per cent of the money they raise to charity, and keep 80 per cent for themselves, he said.

Merchant Sampler is not in the same category as these promoters because the Riverview company is selling a product, the booklets, Merry says.

The Dalhousie Student Union doesn't have any apparent method of control over contracts signed by S.U.-funded organizations with outside promoters.

Such lack of control apparently allows outside promoters to use the name "Dalhousie University" without restriction, if they sign a contract with any campus group.