

Salon owner furious at guidebook fee

Andrew Don

Salon owners have been warned to beware of a new *European City Guide* which could cost them thousands of pounds.

European City Guide, a Spanish company, has been blitzing businesses all over Europe for inclusion in its Internet guide and planned publications.

Andrew Howarth, sales director of Salon Supplies of Crewe, Cheshire, said he was shocked after he received a demand for more than £1,000 to cover the cost of an advert in three editions plus £37 for each directory.

He claims he thought the entry was free and said the form he was originally sent came with a flier for a free entry. He claimed the paragraph of small

print outlining the costs must have been photocopied in a space above his signature.

Howarth has refused to pay but the Barcelona company is insisting he settle the invoice.

HJ spoke to another company outside the sector, Calver Sough Nurseries in Hópe Valley, Derbyshire, which has made a similar allegation.

European City Guide sent *HJ* a copy of Howarth's contract and his signature appears below the small acceptance print. The company faxed a statement saying it took exception to the insinuation it was trying to defraud and denied copying the order above Howarth's signature.

"Our advertising form was carefully designed upon legal advice and we are thus con-

vinced that European guidelines have been strictly observed. The contract is valid in any country."

Several Trading Standards departments across the country have received calls from concerned business owners and are investigating.

The Office of Fair Trading has referred complaints it has received to the Spanish authorities.

Chris Cooper, senior trading standards officer at Durham County Council, said the form in itself was legal but added: "We would warn people to fully consider what they are getting before they part with any money."

Cheshire trading standards is examining the Unsolicited Goods and Services Act 1971 and 1975 to see if it might render the contract unenforceable.



HJ
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