

# Press release: Online dating giant vows clearer path to love

Venntro Media Group Ltd (Venntro), which has over 55 million users worldwide and supplies online dating services through just under 3,500 websites, has been investigated by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) over concerns about misleading claims and how it used people's personal data.

Venntro operates dating sites on behalf of major media outlets and other organisations, including both general and specialist sites that were marketed to people looking for a partner with a specific hobby, interest, ethnicity, locality or religion.

The CMA discovered that people who signed up to Venntro's websites were often unaware their information would be stored in a central database and that their profiles might be visible on the company's other dating sites. It also saw complaints from people who said they had signed up for sites featuring explicit adult content without realising that they were doing so.

The CMA was therefore concerned people could have signed up for a specialist site, yet some of the profiles they saw and people they paid to interact with were not actually subscribers to that site and did not necessarily share their interests. It was also worried that in certain circumstances messages sent between these people would not be received.

As a result of the CMA's investigation, Venntro has made legally binding commitments to make it clear to people before they sign up that it will share their information on other sites and obtain their full agreement to do this. It must provide a list of these sites and will not place members' profiles on sites containing explicit adult material without their additional active consent.

Venntro must also make it easier for people to delete their profile when their subscription ends and not make misleading claims about the number of members on its sites, or the number of messages sent through those sites.

George Lusty, Senior Director for Consumer Protection at the CMA, said:

With millions of people trusting dating sites to find their perfect match, it's important they fully understand how personal information will be used, before they sign up, and that sites tell the truth about what they can offer.

We took action against Venntro because we were concerned people's profiles were being placed on sites without their knowledge or permission, and that they were being misled about how likely they were to meet someone with common ground. As a result of our investigation, Venntro has now pledged to be more upfront with its customers in future.

In addition to this action against Venntro, the CMA has sent warning letters to 14 other leading dating websites and app providers demanding they review their terms and practices to ensure they are fair and comply with consumer protection law.

Together with the UK's privacy regulator, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), the CMA has published [advice for online dating businesses](#) to explain how to fully comply with both consumer and data protection laws. It has also published [advice about what people should watch out for](#) when using online dating services.

## Notes for Editors

1. Venntro also trades under the names 'Global Personals' and 'White Label Dating.' Most of Venntro's websites are managed on a 'white label' basis, which means that Venntro provides the basic infrastructure and its commercial partners provide their own branding to the customer-facing webpage. A large number of Venntro's dating websites are aimed at people with particular interests (like cycling or music) or characteristics (such as ethnicity or religion). The full changes that Venntro will be making are available on the CMA's [case page](#).
2. The key pieces of consumer protection legislation relevant to the CMA's investigation are the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 (CPRs) and Part 2 of the Consumer Rights Act 2015 (CRA). The CPRs contain a general prohibition against unfair commercial practices and specific prohibitions against misleading actions, misleading omissions and aggressive commercial practices. Part 2 of the CRA aims to protect consumers against unfair contract terms and notices, and requires contract terms to be fair and transparent. Ultimately, only a court can rule that a particular term or practice infringes the law.
3. Companies that control and process personal data in the UK, including companies that operate dating websites, also have obligations under the new Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The laws are regulated by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), which is the UK's independent authority set up to uphold information rights in the public interest, promoting openness by public bodies and data privacy for individuals.
4. Media enquiries should be directed to the CMA Press Office ([press@cma.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:press@cma.gsi.gov.uk), 020 3738 6191).

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**[News story: Secretary of State for Scotland David Mundell responds to the](#)**

# EU (Withdrawal) Bill vote

Mr Mundell said:

The EU (Withdrawal) Bill provides certainty for business and families in Scotland as we leave the EU. It fully respects both the spirit and letter of the devolution settlement.

It guarantees the vast majority of powers returning from the UK will go directly to Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast. In a small number of areas current arrangements will remain in place until we can create new UK-wide frameworks.

We have made strenuous efforts during a year of negotiations to reach agreement with the Scottish and Welsh governments. We are disappointed the Scottish Government did not support it, as the Welsh Government has done. The constitutional settlement provides for this situation, and we are proceeding in line with the Sewel Convention.

We now need to look to the future, and I look forward to continuing to work closely with the Scottish Government to create the UK-wide legal frameworks we need to protect the UK internal market – a market which is vital for business and jobs in Scotland.

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## Press release: Directors of debt management company disqualified for 29 years

Robert Michael Solloway, Mark James Harrison and Richard Ian Mott, were all directors of RMR Financial Services Limited, which traded as Compass Debt Counsellors, a debt management company.

Robert Solloway served as a director throughout, while Mark Harrison and Richard Mott were directors at various times throughout the life of the company.

The company traded from offices in Nottingham and attempted to assist people to get out of debt. Clients made monthly payments to the company for a fee with the expectation that their payments would be made to their creditors.

The company was placed into voluntary liquidation in March 2016 and

investigations by the administrator uncovered more than 750 claims from creditors, who had not received their funds.

The Insolvency Service investigated further and established that the company received payments from clients totalling £36.9million with £2.7million returned to clients as refunds or withdrawals from their funds, whilst payments to the client's creditors totalled £17.4million.

Evidence showed a shortfall of £1.6million in funds available to clients. However, in the absence of significant client documents, estimates are that the shortfall may be much higher. The liquidators received creditor claims totalling £4.4million including £4.2million from clients of the company.

The company also used funds to pay its own expenses, including £3.3million to the benefit of the directors over the entire trading period.

And the company also mismanaged their funds. When the company first started until November 2012, funds and the client funds were held together before they were separated. However, between November 2012 and March 2016, the company failed to operate its segregated client account correctly and transferred any surplus client funds to its company expense account.

As a result of the investigation, Robert Solloway, Mark Harrison and Richard Mott gave disqualification undertakings which were accepted by the Secretary of State for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy.

Robert Solloway is disqualified for 11 years and cannot be the director of a company until 2 April 2029, while both Richard Mott and James Harrison are disqualified for nine years each.

David Brooks, Chief Investigator, Investigation and Enforcement Services at the Insolvency Service, said:

Clients believed their debts were being managed and funds they provided to the company passed to creditors. The directors' lack of awareness in how they treated funds going through the company resulted in the losses suffered by clients, some of whom were in vulnerable situations.

These lengthy disqualifications indicate the seriousness of the lack of care the directors showed in running the company.

## **Notes to editors**

RMR Financial Services Limited (CRO No. was incorporated on 29 July 2002 and was based in North West London.

Robert Michael Solloway, date of birth, September 1961, was a director of the company between 29 July 2002 and 30 March 2016, the date the company entered

liquidation.

Mark James Harrison, date of birth, February 1961, was a director of the company between 29 July 2002 and 2 April 2003 and again between 14 September 2005 and the date of liquidation.

Richard Ian Mott, date of birth December 1968, was a director of the company between 29 July 2002 and 16 January 2003 and again between 14 September 2005 and the date of liquidation.

The company was placed into voluntary liquidation in March 2016.

A disqualification order has the effect that without specific permission of a court, a person with a disqualification cannot:

- act as a director of a company
- take part, directly or indirectly, in the promotion, formation or management of a company or limited liability partnership
- be a receiver of a company's property

Disqualification undertakings are the administrative equivalent of a disqualification order but do not involve court proceedings.

Persons subject to a disqualification order are bound by a [range of other restrictions](#).

The Insolvency Service administers the insolvency regime, investigating all compulsory liquidations and individual insolvencies (bankruptcies) through the Official Receiver to establish why they became insolvent. It may also use powers under the Companies Act 1985 to conduct confidential fact-finding investigations into the activities of live limited companies in the UK. In addition, the agency deals with disqualification of directors in corporate failures, assesses and pays statutory entitlement to redundancy payments when an employer cannot or will not pay employees, provides banking and investment services for bankruptcy and liquidation estate funds and advises ministers and other government departments on insolvency law and practice.

Further information about the work of the Insolvency Service, and how to complain about financial misconduct, is [available](#).

## Contact Press Office

Media enquiries for this press release – 020 7637 6498

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## **[Press release: Maximum ban for director involved in multimillion VAT fraud](#)**

Ulhaque Ahtamad was the sole director of Masstech Ltd, a carbon emissions allowance and metals trader based in Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire.

The Insolvency Service started to investigate Ulhaque Ahtamad after Masstech Ltd was wound up for debts owed to HMRC.

The investigation uncovered that between June and September 2009, Masstech Ltd, made sales of more than £38 million in the wholesale trade of carbon emission allowances and metals with little initial finance in place.

The company then filed quarterly returns with HMRC attempting to fraudulently reclaim UK VAT that 'missing traders' earlier in supply chains had failed to pay to HMRC. This was part of a Missing Trader Intracommunity (MTIC)

fraudulent scheme.

In the MTIC fraud trading chain, Masstech Ltd acted as a 'buffer' trader. The buffer is an intermediate trader between at one end the 'missing trader', importing goods and not paying over VAT due to HMRC, and at the other end, the exporter seeking to reclaim VAT that had not been paid.

Buffers serve to increase the distance between the ends of the chain so that the exporter can deny knowledge of the default.

However, it was found that Ulhaque Ahtamad obstructed HMRC and repeatedly stalled their investigations into the company's trading. The court heard that Masstech Ltd entered into trading arrangements which were "too good to be true", and against which the company had been expressly and repeatedly warned by HMRC.

And Ulhaque Ahtamad made payments to unconnected third parties totalling at least £7.38 million, despite having been warned on more than one occasion by HMRC officers of the risks of third party payments in the context of MTIC fraud.

The VAT fraud, including wrongful VAT reclaims against HMRC, resulted in tax losses of over £7.1 million.

The court also heard that as the sole director with responsibility for all aspects of the company's trading, Ulhaque Ahtamad was involved in pricing decisions which ran against any commercial logic and could only be explained in terms of this fraudulent scheme.

And VAT registration and other due diligence checks on trading partners were superficial and inadequate and Ulhaque Ahtamad failed to act on standard commercial risk negative indicators and continued to trade regardless.

The court concluded that Ulhaque Ahtamad must have been a knowing participant in this scheme and that a 15 year ban, the maximum period of disqualification, was appropriate.

Justin Dionne, Official Receiver for the Insolvency Service, said:

"Masstech Ltd was involved in trading and making wrongful reclaims in a fraudulent VAT scheme which had been costing the UK Exchequer significant amounts of money at the time the fraud was perpetrated.

"This is not a victimless crime, the main impact being on honest tax payers and their families who as a result suffered the effects of funding shortages in healthcare, education and other front line services.

"Regulatory changes, investigative action and legal proceedings have reduced the scale of this fraud from 2007 onwards."

"The Insolvency Service will not hesitate to use its enforcement powers to investigate and disqualify directors whose companies defraud the public purse."

Ulhaque Ahtamad's disqualification effective from 3 May 2018 means that he cannot promote, manage, or be a director of a limited company until 2033.

## Notes to editors

Masstech Ltd (CR0 No. 02737217) was incorporated on 4 August 1992 as Masstech Ltd. Its trading address was at Bishops House Market Place, Chalfont St Peter, Gerrards Cross, Bucks, SL9 9EA.

The petition to wind up the company was presented by HMRC on 11 February 2013 for £7,484,940 in respect of unpaid VAT. The winding up order was made against Masstech Ltd on 25 March 2013.

On 12 April 2018 a 15 year Disqualification Order was made at the High Court against UlHaque Lone Ahtamad.

All public enquiries concerning the affairs of the company should be made to: The Official Receiver, Public Interest Unit (London), The Insolvency Service, 2nd Floor, 4 Abbey Orchard Street, London WC1B 3SS. Tel: 020 7637 6230 Email: [piu.or@insolvency.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:piu.or@insolvency.gsi.gov.uk).

The order was pronounced by Insolvency and Companies Court Judge Barber in the High Court of Justice .

Tiran Nersessian, of 4 Stone Buildings appeared for the Insolvency Service and no one appearing for or on behalf of the defendant.

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**[Press release: Birmingham supermarket bosses banned after dodging business](#)**

## rates

Pak Supermarket Washwood Heath Ltd, known as Pak Supermarket, was incorporated on 3 August 2010 and operated in Washwood Heath, Birmingham.

However, the company went into Creditor's Voluntary Liquidation in January 2015 with an estimated deficiency of more than £2.8 million.

Following the company's liquidation, an investigation by the Insolvency Service found that the company had provided misleading information to Birmingham City Council as to the identity and potential liability of the occupants of the supermarket between August 2010 and 13 October 2014.

Over the four years of trading, the company submitted to the council documents relating to eight third-party companies, suggesting these eight companies were, at separate times, the occupants responsible for business rates. As a result, this information hid that the fact that the true occupant was Pak Supermarket and it was the supermarket that was liable to pay business rates.

Prepared accounts and bank analysis showed a turnover for the company in excess of £35million and the company only made a single payment of £5,000 towards a business rates bill of at least £680,000.

Investigators then spoke to Mohammed Younis as he was the sole appointed director of Pak Supermarket between August 2010 and January 2014.

However, he told investigators from the Insolvency Service that from November 2010 he took no part in the management of the company and left it under the control of Zahir Rasul, who was only formally appointed on 15 January 2014.

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy has since accepted disqualification undertakings of eight years from Zahir Rasul and three years from Mohammed Younis, effective from 10 April and 3 May respectively.

This means that they cannot be directors of a company whether directly or indirectly, or be involved in the management of a company in any way for the duration of their disqualifications.

Martin Gitner, Deputy Head of Investigations at the Insolvency Service, said:

Directors have a duty to provide their local council with complete and accurate information with regard to the occupants of trading premises in order to ensure that liability is properly attributed.

Where information provided is found to be false and/or misleading, resulting in a loss of funds to the Council, directors can expect

to be investigated by the Insolvency Service and enforcement action taken to remove them from the market place.

## Notes to editors

Mr Younis was born in April 1971 and he resides in Bradford. He was appointed director on 3 August 2010 and resigned on 15 January 2014

Mr Rasul's date of birth is December 1979 and he resides in Birmingham. He was appointed director on 15 January 2014.

Pak Supermarket Washwood Heath Ltd (CR0 No. 07333282) was incorporated on 3 August 2010 and latterly traded from Washwood Heath Road, Washwood Heath, Birmingham B8 2XJ as a supermarket

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