

Max du Preez domain win is good news for us all

When veteran journalist and author Max du Preez's laptop - complete with work on his latest book - was stolen recently, we all took note, nodded reverently to The Cloud and started backing up our work on Google Docs again. (I hadn't done it in about five months!)

 By Gill Moodie: @grubstreetSA^{25 May 2011}

He may not have got his laptop back but Du Preez did get something else returned to him recently: the right to the domain names, maxdupreez.co.za and maxdupreez.com.

Important ruling for media and marketing

The decision to return these domain names last month to Du Preez from the right-wing writer Daniel Roodt (who seems to style himself as Du Preez's nemesis) after the convening of a .ZA Alternative Dispute Resolution body may have passed largely under the radar screen but it really is an important ruling - and one which all of us in media and marketing should take heed.

And it's good news for all because the .ZA adjudicator decided:

1. That Roodt was mischievous in snapping up the maxdupreez domain names, even allegedly asking for R10 000 to se back to Du Preez.

(The two men have had a long-running much-publicised war of words and Du Preez once [pulled out](#) of a literary fest rather than share a platform with Roodt. [Click here](#) to get the gist of the saga at a Wikipedia profile of Roodt.)

2. That although Du Preez's name may not be a trade mark, he has the right to protect his name.

"The Complainant (Du Preez) relies on his name to promote and sell his books," said the ruling. "It is quite reasonab for him to want to promote himself and his publications through a website to be accessible under his name, e.g. MAXDUPREEZ.CO.ZA. The Complainant equally has the right to protect his name from any confusion which may ar when the domain is used in relation to content which is harmful to his reputation."

3. And that it, therefore, followed, that "...not only can unauthorised persons be stopped from misappropriating such name/trade mark but also (and even more importantly) from using it in a manner causing the owner thereof harm", s the ruling.

Roodt lost the dispute without giving input on Du Preez's complaint timeously but the fact remains that this decision is happ news for us media luvvies.

Clear-cut recourse

Not only do you have clear-cut recourse if some joker swipes your domain name but the bigger context is that it reiterates your right to develop and project your own personal brand.

Du Preez waged this battle - not because he wants to tinker with blogging after hours - but because any author worth his s must have his own website in his own name.

Du Preez told Bizcommunity.com that he had been wanting to start up his own website for a long time but Roodt had grabl the domain name more than two and a half years ago, robbing him of the ability to promote his brand online. This was becoming an ever-pressing problem, said Du Preez, especially considering that his books are published elsewhere in the world and they are available digitally on Amazon.

"In fact, I'm doing a book for a British publisher," he said, "and they asked me for my website so that they could use it as part of their publicity. I had to say: 'Sorry, but if people are Googling me, one of the first things that comes up is Dan Roodt in my name.' That just had to be wrong."

Personal branding is nothing new

The idea of building your personal brand online is nothing new, although it certainly seemed to gain traction amid the recession as many people lost their jobs or began to fear that that they might do so.

For media people, in particular, it is important because the competitive and fast-changing arena in which we work means it could be dropped in a heartbeat if a company's revenues take a dive.

South African media is largely a young person's game - and you're hard pressed to fit in and show your worth once you start approaching 50. On top of this, being in the media - or marketing or advertising for that matter - dictates that you get to handle on all things digital.

So having a blog or website shows that you are wrestling with the nuts and bolts of the technology (even it is just easy peasy WordPress), experimenting with using social media and, most of all, that you're interested in this brave new world. Just having an opinion and being able to discuss aspects of new media means you're on the bus - not left behind at the bus stop protesting meekly about how you don't understand how it all works.

Exit list

Throwing your hands in the air at the mystery of it all is, in fact, the fastest way to get you on the exit list with a younger bunch these days.

In most cases, it is extremely unlikely that you'll ever make any money out of having your own personal blog or website. In many cases - such as my own with www.grubstreet.co.za started more than two years ago - they are purely marketing and branding tools. However, had I not started Grubstreet, I would never have morphed into a media commentator (my first break came when Alec Hogg approached me about 18 months on the basis of reading Grubstreet - via a Tweet of course - to write a weekly media column for his Moneyweb website).

In the beginning stages of Grubstreet, it often felt like I was talking to a void and although one - quite naturally - goes through troughs and peaks in interest in maintaining one's own site, mine was key in establishing my name beyond reportage bylines in newspapers.

When it comes to building personal brands, Du Preez is much further along the curve than most of us. He took his reputation as a fearless struggle journalist and newspaper editor and - long before the advent of widespread blogging - built his brand as a hugely intelligent, highly respected commentator and author. Now he's protected that brand online.

Protecting your intellectual property

Ultimately, it's about protecting your intellectual property, your thoughts and ideas. So if you're in the employ of a media house, try keep some of your best content back and get it out there by yourself. The company for which you work may own the copyright to your work but they don't own you.

For more:

- The New York Times: ["5 ways to develop your own brand"](#)
- ZADna: [ZA. ZA Alternative Dispute Resolution ruling on Max du Preez domain name dispute](#)
- News24: [Max du Preez's columns](#)
- Roodt.org: [Dan Roodt's personal blog](#)

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