

Vodacom barred from 'best network' claim in advertisements

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Cell phone giant Vodacom has been found to be less than truthful after claiming in television adverts to have the "best network" and the "widest network coverage" in South Africa.



In a ruling made last week, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) found that Vodacom could not make these claims. But it could brag about having "less dropped calls" and for providing the "best internet and calling experience".

The ruling comes after competitor MTN lodged a complaint with the authority about a television commercial flighted on SABC3 in October last year.

The advert featured a member of a fictional family voicing frustration over her network's dropped calls and lack of service. Another family member urges her to switch to Vodacom because it has the widest network coverage, fewer dropped calls, and the best and fastest 3G and LTE (long term evolution) network for smartphones. The family member in the advert further says Vodacom is the best network in South Africa and provides the best internet and calling experience.

Disparaging remarks

MTN argued that viewers would assume the "disparaging remarks" about another network referred to it. Therefore, the advert was intended to "devalue and trash" MTN. It did not approve of the use of the phrase "manga manga" in the advert.

Further, MTN said it was "impossible" for Vodacom to "substantiate the blanket, unqualified claims" it made in the advert. "Vodacom has had ongoing difficulties with its network," with many of its customers complaining about it.

Vodacom defended itself, saying because it had more than 38 million subscribers, 10,000 base stations and thousands of

kilometres of networking infrastructure, "problems are bound to occur". It had "the best network, not a perfect network", it said.

"We've spent (more than) R30bn on our network over the past six years, so we'd expect to be able to make these kind of leadership statements," Vodacom spokesman Richard Boorman said.

On the widest coverage claim, he said that the network "needs to do a bit more homework on substantiating the basic fact".

The advertising authority ruled that Vodacom had not disparaged other networks.

Weighing options

The GM for commercial legal matters at MTN, Fusi Mokoena, said on Tuesday that the mobile operator was studying the ASA ruling. "If there is a basis for appeal, it will weigh its options of doing so."

The ruling comes when the mobile industry is facing another legal showdown, with MTN and Vodacom taking the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (Icasa) to court over mobile call termination regulations.

Last month, Icasa introduced lower termination rates that favour smaller networks Cell C and Telkom Mobile.

The move has not gone down well with South Africa's leading network operators, MTN and Vodacom.

Source: Business Day via I-NET Bridge

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