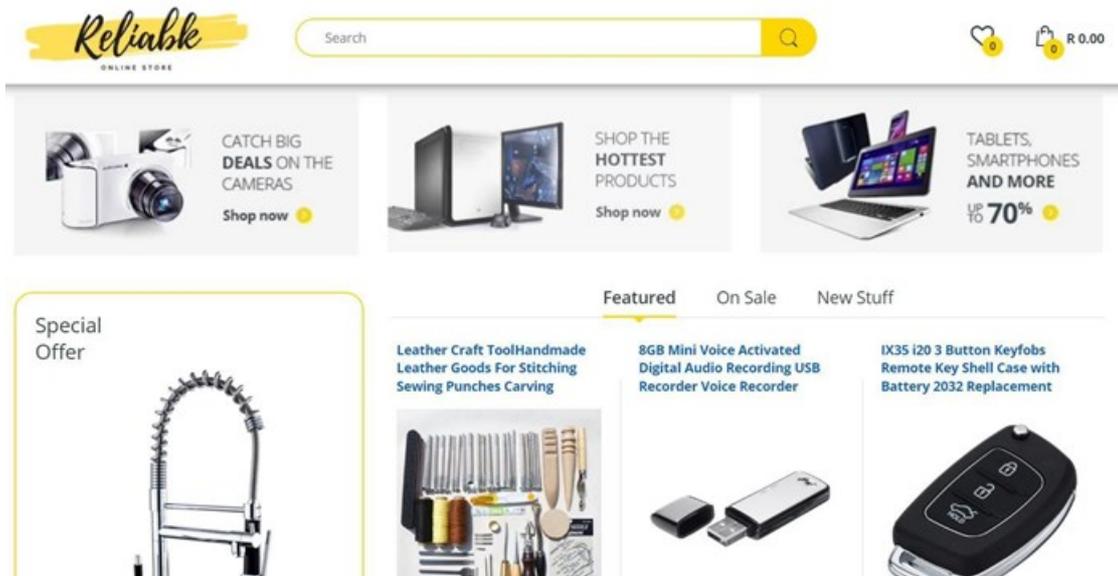


Consumers warned to be wary of unreliable Reliable Store - Ombud

The Consumer Goods and Services Ombud (CGSO) has issued a consumer alert urging customers to exercise caution when purchasing from local online retailer Reliable Store, following numerous complaints about a lack of service delivery.



"Consumers are warned to be careful when trading with Reliable Store as they have [shown], based on their response to complaints received by this office, to not be reliable," the watchdog said in a media statement.

Reliable Store operates purely online and sells a large variety of products including electrical appliances, computers and accessories, cameras, and gaming devices.

Poor complaint resolution

"Most of the complaints received relate to delays in delivering orders, the delivery of incorrect orders to complainants and a general failure to deliver orders. Reliable Store accepts payment from complainants and provides a turnaround time for deliveries, however, they tend to fail to keep up with the stipulated times. When complainants cancel their orders and request refunds, they fail to refund or take a long time to do so," CGSO said.

CGSO was originally dealing with complaints against the retailer, the retailer would respond to some of the complaints from the ombud's office and CGSO would also receive acknowledgement emails from the supplier.



E-commerce sector generating bulk of consumer complaints - Ombud

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According to CGSO, the supplier refunded some complainants and delivered the correct orders in some of the resolved complaints. However, Reliable Store has since stopped responding to the watchdog and to the complainants and has subsequently stopped resolving complaints.

"And in 35 of the complaints, we have issued Termination Notices and advised the complainants to escalate the complaints to the National Consumer Commission due to no co-operation from the supplier," CGSO said.

"It therefore seems that the supplier is in contravention of section 19 of the Consumer Protection Act (CPA) which provides that a supplier must refund a consumer if they are unable to deliver goods or services on the agreed date. The supplier also seems to be contravening section 41 of the CPA which relates to false, misleading, or deceptive representations regarding the availability, delivery or performance of services within a specified time."

Untrustworthy companies to be named and shamed

According to the Ombudsman Magauta Mphahlele, 25% of all complaints received by the CGSO in this financial year related to online shopping. "Our office continues to monitor this trend and will not hesitate to name and shame online suppliers who fail to cooperate with our office to resolve complaints. We urge all online suppliers to comply with the Consumer Protection Act. We also urge consumers to be vigilant and deal only with reputable online suppliers.

"One criterion that consumers can use is to check the website of the supplier if they are registered with the CGSO. All retailers in South Africa are required to register with the CGSO in order to give confidence to the consumer that they will comply with the CPA and resolve disputes.

"The message is clear: getting the basics right and engaging with customers in an ethical, transparent manner is a competitive advantage in today's online marketplace," concludes Mphahlele.

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