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Gang member jailed for £1.9m VAT fraud

The final member of a gang, who attempted to fraudulently claim a £1.9m VAT refund, has been jailed for four years after an investigation by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

Darren Thomas, 42, from Bath but who lived in Nottinghamshire at the time of the fraud and his arrest, was part of a four-strong group who conned several UK companies by falsely claiming they had secured a £15m publicity contract from Dubai's Department of Tourism.

There was no contract and no money and as soon as the targeted businesses agreed to sell advertising space, the gang demanded invoices – these

supported the fraudulent VAT claim.

Richard Wentel, Assistant Director, Criminal Investigation, HMRC, said:

“HMRC is devoting more resources than ever to tracking down fraudsters. This case sends out a clear message that we are coming after them.

“All four men were utterly determined to commit a huge fraud, starting with their initial repayment claim and the prison sentence handed to Thomas means all have now been brought to justice for sentences totalling more than 18 years.”

Notes for editors

HMRC became suspicious when newly-registered Wilnecote Hall Marketing (WHM) Ltd submitted the huge VAT repayment claim in April 2011, despite having an estimated turnover of only £1 million a year.

HMRC’s investigations revealed the ringleaders had enlisted the support of Thomas, who adopted a false identity and acted as a negotiator supposedly between the Government of Dubai’s Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DDTCM), WHM and the companies selling advertising space.

Thomas was found guilty after a trial at Derby Crown Court and sentenced to four years in prison for his part in the fraud when he appeared at Northampton Crown Court on Friday.

In May 2014, after being found guilty at a trial, three men involved in the fraud were jailed for a total of fourteen-and-a-half years, two of which were also disqualified from acting as directors for eight and seven years respectively.

1. Darren Thomas, DOB 03/10/72 of The Green, Farmborough, Bath, was charged with Conspiracy to Cheat the Public Revenue and found guilty on Friday 15 May 2015 after a trial at Derby Crown Court. He was sentenced to four years in prison at Northampton Crown Court on Friday 12 June 2015.

2. The three other men were sentenced in May 2014, after being found guilty

at trial. Full story: <http://www.mynewsdesk.com/uk/hm-revenue-customs-hmrc/pressreleases/trip-to-jail-for-ps1-9m-tourism-advertising-conmen-997393>

3. WHM Ltd submitted a VAT repayment claim to HMRC for £1,929,259 in April 2011. The claim was not paid.

4. WHM tricked the UK companies into agreeing advertising deals worth almost £10 million, for periods of up to four years.

5. Follow us on Twitter @hmrcgovuk

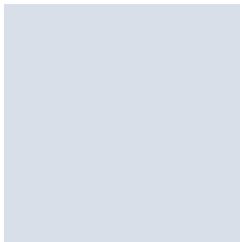
6. HMRC's Flickr channel: www.flickr.com/hmrcgovuk

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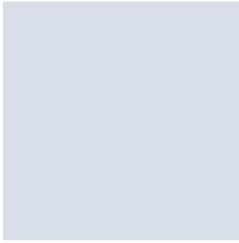
HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) is the UK's tax authority.

HMRC is responsible for making sure that the money is available to fund the UK's public services and for helping families and individuals with targeted financial support.

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