

EasyJet billionaire Stelios calls charity website ‘brand thief’

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Sir Stelios Haji-Ioannou, the easyJet founder, is suing a charity donations website for using “easy” in its name, the latest in a series of lawsuits designed to defend his brand.

EasyGroup, his private firm that is invested in companies such as easyHotel and easyGym, has filed a lawsuit for “brand theft” against Easyfundraising.

The charity site allows retailers to make micro-donations when shoppers buy goods online. The company bills itself as “Britain’s biggest charity shopping site” and has signed up more than 6,000 retailers including Tesco, Amazon and Argos. It makes a small profit from each donation.

EasyGroup has issued legal proceedings against its founder, Ian Woodroffe, and Manchester-based Palatine

Private Equity, which bought a minority stake in 2020.

“Brand thieves profit by creating major confusion in the minds of their customers, many of whom will think they are dealing with a member of the easy family of brands,” an EasyGroup spokesman said.

The company noted that the site was founded in 2005, 11 years after Sir Stelios first used the “easy” brand.

EasyGroup is highly protective of its name and has taken action against firms all over the world for using the term “easy”. Companies within its stable pay a fee for use of the word; in 2021, easyJet paid a £4 million royalty for its name.

Recent victories include a fight against EasyAirpark, a Greek car parking firm; easyCosmetic, an online retailer; and Colombian airline EasyFly. Other targets include the Netflix series

Easy, starring Orlando Bloom. EasyGroup has not always been successful: in 2018 it lost a case against flat-sharing site easyroommate.

Easyfundraising rejected the claims and said it had a registered trade mark based on evidence “showing how distinctive [it] is in the eyes of the UK consumer”. It said: “We do not accept that these opportunistic allegations have any prospect of success and will vigorously defend our position in court should this be necessary.”

Easyfundraising claims to have raised £40 million for charities from schools to Scout groups over the past 16 years. Its parent company reported a £600,000 loss in the year to December 2020, due to interest repayments.

It is understood that one EasyGroup company signed up to the platform before the brand conflict was noticed.

