

Jury finds former Coke employee guilty in conspiracy to steal and sell Coca Cola trade secrets

by Bend Weekly News Sources

A federal jury today found Joya Williams, 41, of Norcross, Ga., guilty on the charge of conspiring to steal and sell The Coca Cola Company's trade secrets. Williams was found guilty of conspiring to unlawfully obtain and sell trade secrets after a federal trial which lasted seven days. The jury returned their guilty verdict after a day and a half of deliberation.

"This defendant misused her unique access as an employee to Coke's trade secrets and other proprietary, confidential information for personal profit," said United States Attorney David E. Nahmias. "Because of good corporate citizenship by Coke's competitor and aggressive work by the FBI and the prosecutors in this case, the evidence needed to prosecute this case was gathered and the two co-defendants quickly pleaded guilty. Today's guilty verdict by the jury has brought the final defendant to justice."

"The government's resolve to assist corporations in protecting their intellectual property from theft remains strong," said FBI Special Agent In Charge Greg Jones. "The FBI's Cyber Crimes Program has demonstrated itself, as evident in this case, as being capable of building strong criminal cases within the cyber arena."

According to U.S. Attorney Nahmias and evidence presented at trial: On May 19, 2006, PepsiCo provided to Coca Cola headquarters in Atlanta a copy of a letter mailed to PepsiCo in Purchase, New York, in an official Coca Cola business envelope. The letter, postmarked from the Bronx, New York, was from an individual identifying himself as "Dirk," who claimed to be employed at a high level with Coca Cola and offered "very detailed and confidential information." Coca Cola immediately contacted the FBI and an undercover FBI investigation began. FBI investigation determined that "Dirk" was Ibrahim Dimson, 30, of the Bronx, New York. Subsequent investigation revealed that another "go-between" in the attempted deal was Edmund Duhaney, 43, of Decatur, Ga. Dimson and Duhaney both later pleaded guilty to a charge of conspiracy to steal and sell trade secrets. Duhaney testified at trial.

Phone records and further investigation showed the source of the information was in fact Ms. Williams, at the time an Executive Administrative Assistant at Coke in Atlanta, who had access to the information and materials described by "Dirk." Evidence at trial showed that "Dirk" provided to an FBI undercover agent, among other things, 14 pages of Coca Cola documents with logo-marked "Classified -- Confidential" and "CLASSIFIED -- Highly Restricted." The company confirmed that these documents were valid and highly confidential and contained highly classified proprietary information-trade secrets. Almost immediately, "Dirk" requested \$10,000 for the documents sent as proof, emailing, in part, "I must see some type of seriousness on their part, if I'm to maintain the faith to continue with you guys, or if I need to look towards another entity that will be interested in a relationship with me. I have the capability of obtaining information per request. I have information that's all classified and extremely confidential, that only a handful of the top execs at my company have seen. I can even provide actual products and packaging of certain products, that no eye has seen, outside of maybe five top execs. I need to know today, if I have a serious partner or not. If the good faith moneys is in my account by Monday, that will be an indication of your seriousness."

Later "Dirk" produced other documents, provided by Joya Williams, that Coca Cola confirmed were valid trade secrets of Coca Cola and highly confidential, and was to receive \$5,000 for the documents received as good faith money for additional purchases. "Dirk" also agreed to an amount of \$75,000 for the purchase of a highly confidential product sample from a new Coca Cola project.

Meanwhile, with the cooperation and assistance of Coca Cola security personnel, video surveillance presented at trial showed Ms. Williams at her desk going through a loose-leaf file looking for documents and stuffing them into bags. The evidence at trial also showed a glass container with a white label, which resembled the description of a new Coca Cola product sample falling out of her personal bag. Coca Cola later verified the sample was genuine and is in fact a product being developed by the company.

On June 16, 2006, a FBI undercover agent met with Dimson ("Dirk") at Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, with "Dirk" providing a brown Armani Exchange bag containing one manila envelope with documents marked "highly confidential" and one glass bottle with a white label containing a liquid product sample. The undercover agent paid "Dirk" \$30,000 in \$100 and \$50 bills of U.S. currency contained within a yellow Girl Scout cookie box with the agreement that after successful testing of the product sample, an additional \$45,000 would be paid. After leaving, Dimson met in a rental car with Duhaney and they drove to Duhaney's home in Decatur. Call records showed that Duhaney was in contact with Dimson and Williams on that day. On June 27, 2006, an undercover FBI agent offered to buy the remaining trade secret items for \$1.5 million from "Dirk." The same day a bank account was opened under the name of Noblehouse Group, LLC, and the address used on the account was that of Duhaney's Decatur residence. The purpose of the account was to facilitate the transfer of the \$1.5 million. Williams, Dimson, and Duhaney were arrested in Atlanta without incident on July 5, 2006, the day the \$1.5 million deal was to take place.

This case was investigated by the FBI. Assistant U.S. Attorneys BJay Pak and Randy S. Chartash prosecuted the case.

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